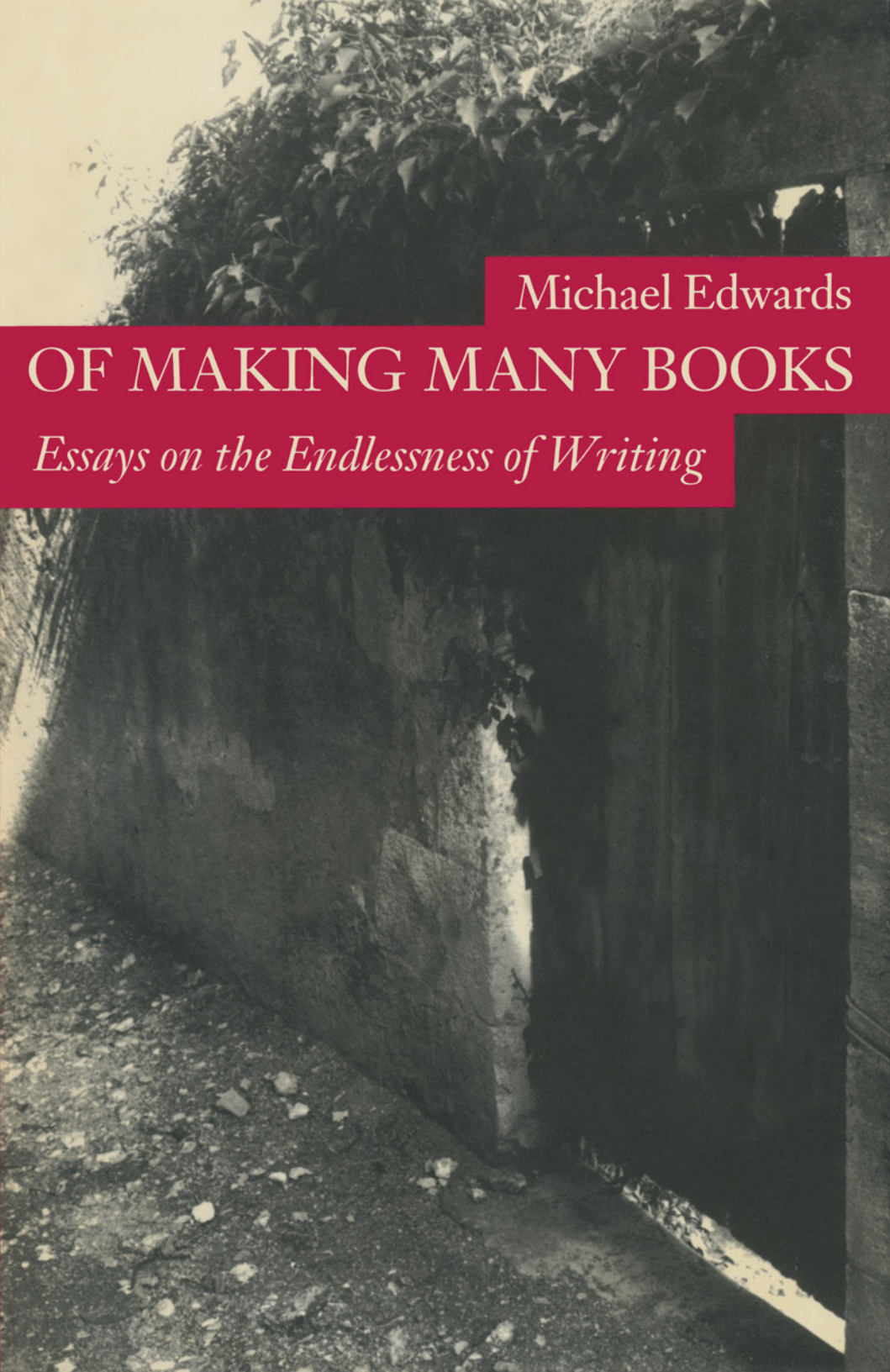

Michael Edwards

OF MAKING MANY BOOKS

Essays on the Endlessness of Writing

OF MAKING MANY BOOKS

Also by Michael Edwards

COLLECTED POEMS: 1964–1988
(*forthcoming*)
LA TRAGÉDIE RACINIENNE
TOWARDS A CHRISTIAN POETICS
POETRY AND POSSIBILITY

Of Making Many Books

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Palgrave Macmillan

ISBN 978-1-349-21036-7 ISBN 978-1-349-21034-3 (eBook)
DOI 10.1007/978-1-349-21034-3

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Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 1990 978-0-333-48911-6

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Scholarly and Reference Division,
St. Martin's Press, Inc., 175 Fifth Avenue,
New York, N.Y. 10010

First published in the United States of America in 1990

ISBN 978-0-312-04485-5

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Edwards, Michael, 1938–
Of making many books / Michael Edwards.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN 978-0-312-04485-5
I. Title.
PR9619.3.E3035 1990
809—dc20 89–77793
CIP

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Preface

Of making many books there is no end. The more one meditates this 'admonition' from the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes, the more contemporary it becomes. It descends into all the anxieties one associates with writing. There is the familiar burden of the past, and the sense that whenever one writes it is late; the world has grown old with watching, and one is in danger of merely aggravating the problem, of the huge and unknowable accumulation of times and of texts. There is also the burden of the future. The endlessness of books stretches beyond the writer, and gathers him into its onward inertia. It threatens to consume his intention, to void his act of making. Borges takes to an appalling extreme this blanking of the individual and of futurity in 'The Library of Babel', in *Fictions*, with its witty suggestion that the Library, which some call the universe, is total, and contains (already) all that it is possible to express.

If only one could simply write. And why is it that one cannot? As soon as one begins one encounters the even deeper anxieties which the Preacher's words give on to: the lack of a beginning, the inadequacy of the 'I', the equivocation of the 'you', of the reality which writing desires. The manyness of books is a function of the manyness of history, of self, of the world. We write so as to understand these things, and we have to keep on writing, restlessly, because we never find rest in them.

The making of many books, the Preacher implies, is a necessary fact of the human condition. But no facts are there merely to be undergone, and one needs to take a second look at the vanity of writing. The power of the phrase, in causing one to ask, so many hundreds of years later, why we make books and under what necessity we go on making them, is to defy one to reverse the sign, and to praise books as well as blame. One continues trying to write and failing to write the one poem, maybe, or the single, short, philosophical essay, which would achieve all that is required, but one learns on the way the deeps of language, the virtue of words to call to a world, to change it over and again, and to make it, however impermanently, our habitation. One learns that part of the endlessness of books is their endless possibility.

So I begin with a chapter on Montaigne and Eliot, in their

respective times, because they engaged with the issue directly. I explore the negative energies set loose in the *Essais* and *The Waste Land* by distress at the plethora of past writing and of the past itself. The ensuing chapters continue to sound the question, in terms of the loss of origin and of the consequently perplexed relation between writing and reality, but they also research the ways of answering that loss and re-creating that relation. The focus is mainly on poetry and poets, from Shakespeare to the present day. I have also wanted, however, to come to a fresh understanding of writing in general, as of the nature of self, the experience of history, the use of memory and of the imagination. The Preacher's dictum, remote in time and foreign in culture, meets but also upsets our present modes of thinking, and enables one to reflect anew on these matters, about which we are in some disarray, and to respond in ways which are of now but not merely of now.

The end of the book returns to its own beginning, for a study of Eliot's own reversal of sign in his re-writing of *The Waste Land*, and of Ecclesiastes, in *Four Quartets*. A final chapter on St John's Gospel concludes the book's several readings of biblical narratives with the examination of an unexpected New Testament response: a recuperation, a redemption, of the very idea of the making of many books.

Leamington Spa M.E.

Acknowledgements

'Of Making Many Books': the original version, 'Écrire des livres n'aura jamais de fin', was given as a lecture at the Collège de France on the invitation of Yves Bonnefoy. It was published in the review *Corps Écrit* (issue 23, *La critique aujourd'hui*, 1987), edited by Béatrice Didier. The English version was given as a guest lecture at the University of Warwick.

'Likeness': a shorter version with the title 'The Magic of Verisimilitude' was an Inaugural Lecture at the University of Warwick.

'Dream': the original version, 'Dialectique du rêve et du réel', was read at a Colloque de Loches on *Poésie et vérité*, on the invitation of Gilbert Gadoffre. It was published in Bulletin 86 of the Institut Collégial Européen, 1986, and subsequently in *Vérité poétique et vérité scientifique*, edited by Yves Bonnefoy, André Lichnérowicz and M.-P. Schützenberger (Presses Universitaires de France, 1989).

'Romanticism and After' began as a paper called 'Writing and Redemption' delivered at a conference on *Writing the Future* organised by the Centre for Research in Philosophy and Literature at the University of Warwick. This was published in *Writing the Future*, edited by David Wood (Routledge, 1989).

'Pierre Reverdy': the original was read, in a shorter form and under the title 'Reverdy et le pourquoi de la poésie', at a centenary conference, *Reverdy Aujourd'hui*, organised by Michel Collot and Jean-Claude Mathieu and held at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris.

'Pierre Emmanuel': the original was read, in a shorter form and with the title 'Sur une poétique de Pierre Emmanuel', at a conference, *Poésie 1945–1960: les mots, la voix*, organised by Marie-Claire Bancquart and held at the Sorbonne. It was published in *Poésie 1945–1960: les mots, la voix* (Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1989).

'Tomlinson' is the expansion of a review article published in the *Times Literary Supplement* for 21 March 1986.

'Not I' was read in a shorter form at the British Comparative Literature Association Congress on *Literary Representations of the Self*, held at the University of Leicester, on the invitation of Arthur Terry.

'History': an earlier version, 'La légende arthurienne et la lecture mythique de l'histoire', was read at a Colloque de Loches on *L'Imaginaire historique*, and published in the review *Storia della storiografia* (Milan, issue 14, 1988).

'Re-writing *The Waste Land*' was delivered, in a shortened version, at a Conference on Literature and Religion, *Where the Wasteland Ends*, held at the University of Durham. This was published in *Ends of Time*, edited by Colin Crowder and David Jasper (Macmillan, 1990).

'The World Could Not Contain the Books' was read at a conference on *The Bible as Rhetoric* organised by the Centre for Research in Philosophy and Literature of the University of Warwick, and was published in *The Bible as Rhetoric*, edited by Martin Warner (Routledge, 1989).

Acknowledgements and thanks are due to Faber & Faber Ltd, London, and to Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Inc., for permission to quote from *Collected Poems 1909–1962*, *Murder in the Cathedral* and *The Family Reunion*, all by T. S. Eliot; to Oxford University Press for permission to quote from *Collected Poems* (1987) by Charles Tomlinson; and to Éditions Flammarion, Paris, for the extracts from *Plupart du temps* by Pierre Reverdy.

1

Of Making Many Books

The distress of writing is partly that so many others have already written. One sometimes wrestles with the angel of one predecessor, maybe out of an aggressive anxiety which tough-minded critics think of as the norm, or out of unreluctant admiration and a proper sense of one's own inadequacy. I find, however, as reader and as writer, that a more fundamental struggle is with the totality of the past. One does not write the first poem, the first narrative; from the opening word of one's earliest work, one impinges on a world which is already full of writing.

Even literary movements might be characterised in terms of their negotiating with this larger question. Literary history, it is true, is something of a lure, and generalisations are often the sign of intellectual fatigue. Yet it does seem correct to think that neoclassical writers overcome at least part of their worry by absorbing the past, both literary and historical, into a present outside of time. Writers in France and England appropriate classical works by means of imitation, appreciative parody, translation. It needs noticing that La Fontaine's major work is a translation in a quite strict sense of the term; in a wider sense, one might say of Racine that he is the greatest French translator. Certain commonplaces of the time change meaning slightly when looked at in this light. The injustice towards Ronsard in Boileau's notorious 'Enfin Malherbe vint', 'At last came Malherbe' (*Art poétique*, I 131), can be explained in part by the desire of the new legislator to create a *now* for poetry of recent origin, capable of joining, across the incongruity of the intervening periods, the now of antiquity. Pope's excitement on realising Virgil's excitement at the moment when '*Nature* and *Homer* were, he found, the *same*' (*An Essay on Criticism*, line 135), is a raising of literary history into an unchanging present, and accounts for the lack of unease with which he urges poets to 'trace the Muses *upward* to their *Spring*' (line 127). One might also take the measure, in this context, of a surprising statement of Dryden's, in the preface to *Sylvae, or the Second Part of Poetical Miscellanies*, concerning his translation of the twenty-ninth ode of Horace's

third book: 'I have taken some pains to make it my masterpiece in English'.

Neoclassicism rewrites the literary past and creates a kind of palimpsest literature, or translation literature. It is an art of translation. Romantic writers discover confidence in the opposite direction. Preoccupied by history, and well aware of the gulfs of time, they circumvent their fear of the writings of others by inventing a new form of present, freed of the past. The *now* of the Romantic creative act is, typically, the presence one to the other, the contemporaneity, of the poet and Nature, or even, in Shelley's phrase from the *Defence of Poetry*, the participation of the poet 'in the eternal, the infinite, and the one'. Certain of the passwords of Romanticism: genius, inspiration, originality, creation, imagination, can be seen as the means for enabling the writer to bracket the past and discover a beginning within himself. Even Wordsworth's determination, according to the preface of the *Lyrical Ballads*, to 'adopt the very language of men', which is partly communal and political, is also a refusal of his patrimony, of that 'large portion of phrases and figures of speech which from father to son have long been regarded as the common inheritance of Poets'.

Writers in two other periods have reacted rather differently to the oppressive superabundance of history. The Renaissance was in one perspective an invasion by the past, by a multiplication of classical texts and by the arresting prestige of their authors. Modernism, as a continuation of the 'Decadence', was a fear in many of belonging to a senile civilisation spilling over with books, all its resources exhausted. Two works in particular, the *Essais* of Montaigne and *The Waste Land* of Eliot, bear the marks of a profound distress before a past which seems to render all writing vain. Both Montaigne and Eliot secure their existence as writers by compelling the past to figure in their texts as an excess and a disorder.

* * *

The *Essays* are by no means isolated in the sixteenth century. Ronsard in the 'Ode to Michel de l'Hôpital', which is an allegory of his part melancholy, part triumphant relation to the history of poetry, and Du Bellay in *The Antiquities of Rome*, likewise registered disquiet at the degeneration of time or the loss of an architecture of the past. Montaigne's writing is nevertheless the most instructive

in the perspective I have chosen; and the method he found for elaborating his work, along with the manner in which he lived the relationship between his essays and his life, are close to those of a poet. His strange, abnormal text even bears an unexpected but near resemblance to *The Waste Land*. With due allowance made for the obvious differences, *The Waste Land* is Eliot's *Essays*, while the *Essays* are Montaigne's *Waste Land*.

Montaigne was writing in a period ravaged by the wars of religion, but the image which he presents of the Renaissance world is one of far greater devastation, and can surprise by its apocalyptic colouring. 'If we turn our eyes in any direction, everything is collapsing around us; in all the great states, whether of Christendom or beyond, of which we have knowledge, look closely, and you will find an evident threat of change and ruin'. This is from the essay 'On Vanity' (Book III, chapter 9), which was not thought important enough for the Penguin translation and to which I shall return. Doubtless Montaigne does not quite believe that the catastrophe will occur, since God can use these sicknesses to purge the world and restore it to health. Nevertheless, in a passage added in hand to his own copy of the *Essays*, a few lines later, he returns to the theme of the world's end: 'this also weighs on me, that the evil most closely menacing us is not a deterioration of the whole and solid mass, but its dissipation and tearing asunder, the extremity of our fears'. The text of the *Essays* enacts this 'collapse' and this supreme 'menace', and one might already think of Eliot, since *The Waste Land* too undergoes in its very structure a kind of 'dissipation'. Montaigne also adds that the stars themselves seem to ordain that 'we have lasted long enough', and prefigures something of the atmosphere of lassitude in Eliot's poem, while also announcing, as we shall see, its epigraph.

Montaigne composes, in his library, a work which disintegrates in keeping with the world he inhabits, and the past fails signally to offer the refuge of a coherence. Social practices have often and everywhere been the representations of our follies, and 'no fantasy, however insane, drops into the human imagination which does not meet with the example of some public custom'. The disarming and yet terrible assertion, from an essay interestingly entitled 'On custom, and how a received law should not be easily changed' (I 23), is followed by instances of such practices, and by two or three pages of ungrammatical sentences each beginning with the word 'Où' ('Where the most desirable burial is to be eaten by dogs',

etc.), which push further and further into a geography of teeming absurdity. The exemplary events of history, to which a Renaissance writer ought to be able to turn for illumination, thrust at one contradictory teachings: sleep is necessary, since Perseus King of Macedon was killed by being kept awake, and yet here is Pliny claiming that many have lived a great length of time without sleep, while Herodotus tells of nations where they sleep and stay awake alternately over periods of half a year (I 44). The history of human intelligence, as of the intelligence of Montaigne himself, is merely 'a continual agitation and mutation of . . . thoughts' (III 9), a flux of thinking, a noorrhoea, rather than the story of the mind's gradual organisation of its knowledge. Above all, books, which recount that past and, in a sense, constitute it, merely accumulate in an irrepressible superfluity, while commentaries, or books about books, pile even higher through an endless addition vainly searching for zero, that is, for the revelation of the true meaning of a text. 'Where do we find an end to the need for interpreting?' (III 13). In these conditions, a book of essays is hardly going to gather the past into a structure of wisdom. The *Essays* are the imitation, the *mimesis*, of the mobile and plethoric nature of history: a bilingual text (as *The Waste Land* is multilingual), written in French and Latin, and sewn (like Eliot's poem) into a kind of patchwork by an implausible quantity of historical episodes and literary quotations.

The shock of the past is felt in the very first essay, 'By diverse means one comes to the same end'. The title says much about Montaigne's devious method, since it masks the real subject of the essay, and the single thought which lies deepest in all the essays: death, and since it promises to seize a world of diversity and reduce it to an order, whereas its effect is quite the contrary. The opening sentences do correspond to the title: 'The most usual way of softening the hearts of those we have offended . . . is to move them . . . to commiseration and pity. Nevertheless, courage and constancy . . . have sometimes produced the same result'. But the opposite is equally true: conquerors may be roused to indignation by the defiance of the conquered, or, according to the logic of this reversal, despise their submissiveness. The essay is a miscellany of anecdotes which, instead of working progressively towards a practical wisdom teaching one how, in a given situation, one may save one's life, slowly disperses. Montaigne insinuates this impossibility of unity by throwing another light on to the key word

of his title in the well known sentence by which the essay changes direction: 'Most certainly, man is a subject marvellously vain, diverse, and undulating'. The 'diversity' of actions and their effects is irremediable, and irreducible to 'sameness', since it derives from the diversity of man. Writing dissipates a world apparently unified, and Montaigne's title could have been: 'By the same means one comes to diverse ends'. At the risk of exaggerating (but then it is often through exaggeration that thought finds its object), the *Essays* are a kind of *terre gaste* or wasteland of quotations and contradictory narratives.

Montaigne resolves the problem of how to begin to write, and holds up against his disquiet at the past, by plunging immediately into superabundance and contradiction. The movement of his writing, the process of his text, will continue to reflect undulating diversity. One could even think that the great seriousness of his book lies in its aspiration to being a caricature. He scatters the essays with self-reflexive reflections alive with metaphor, and the tone is generally mocking and, indeed, insulting. Among the metaphors, 'piece' is of interest as linking the human condition to the condition of Montaigne's writings. According to the opening of the second Book, which begins in the same way as the first, the actions of men are so strangely contradictory that it is impossible for us to 'piece them together', 'to match these pieces', since we are ourselves 'all made up of bits, and are of such a shapeless and diverse constitution that each piece and each distinct moment plays a different part'. Similarly, according to an essay on friendship in the first Book (I 28), the essays themselves are merely 'grotesques and monstrous bodies, pieced together from diverse limbs'. Montaigne seems to accept them as such, as his own way of responding to the reality which they imitate (and also, as is clear in the context, to the incomparable talent of another writer, Étienne de la Boétie, and to the genius of antiquity). In another, 'On idleness' (I 8), he considers once again his 'so many chimeras and fantastical monsters', and rather than renounce them, as one would expect from the direction of the argument, he states, in a tone difficult to judge, that he has begun to 'keep a register of them' – that is, to write the *Essays* – so as to be able to contemplate at ease their 'strangeness' and 'ineptness'. Literary history is involved, and is scourged. He chooses, in both 'On friendship' and 'On idleness', to place himself under the sway of a classical writer, but the placing is burlesque. Each essay quotes different lines from the opening

of Horace's *Ars Poetica*, not so as to justify Montaigne's procedure but to deride it – or to justify and deride it simultaneously. The reference to monstrous bodies is founded on Horace's description (line 4) of the upper part of a beautiful woman which ends in a fish; the follies and reveries of an idle mind are authorised by his allusion in lines 7 and 8 to the 'vain fancies' which are found in a 'sick man's dreams'. Yet Horace is describing the comic failures of poets and painters who are incompetent, and is also evoking the dark side of the imagination. In agreeing to apply this to his own work, Montaigne aligns himself, not with writers capable of profiting from Horace's counsel, but with the writers one is taught to avoid.

The essay on idleness in particular, an early reflection on the project of the *Essays* and on the surprises of creativity, can remind one again of Eliot. Montaigne compares the monsters which his mind is breeding to the 'hundred thousand kinds of wild and unprofitable weeds' which swarm over idle or fallow ground ('terres oisives') when it is fat and fertile. He could be describing the innumerable weeds of *The Waste Land*, and *Terre oisive* would even be a suitable translation of Eliot's title.

Reading the *Essays*, one is continually made aware of the process by which they have come into being, and also of where they are being written. They are assembled in a library, as Montaigne casts about to 'friponner', or to 'filch' (II 18), from the many volumes which, literally, surround him. And he has no desire to leave this place of books, this towered 'where' of writing (which also resembles that in which Proust's Marcel will discover his vocation). Being a private citizen rather than an important personage, he says, he is not 'erecting a statue to be set up in the market place of a town, or a church, or a public square . . . . It is for the corner of a library'. In a famous manuscript addition he notes, as if he had been reading the latest Parisian theory: 'I have no more made my book than my book has made me', and considers the *Essays* to be 'a book consubstantial with its author'. In a way, he really does become 'the matter of [his] book', as he declares himself to be in the preface, both in the sense that he has now found his place among the other books on the shelves, so that a 'Montaigne' is an object which I got down with a view to writing this chapter, and in the sense that his life and opinions enjoy a similar historical and fictive status to, say, the 'matter of Britain'.

If the *Essays* are a book made up of books, however, and a work

which, in the manner of language in Saussurian linguistics, relates to other works before relating to the world, this is, in the highest degree, paradoxical. For a darkness invades them with the thought of the plethora of books, of the redundance of the past. In the 'Apologie de Raimond Sebond' (II 12), having remarked that 'philosophy . . . has so many faces and so much variety that all our dreams and reveries are found there', with what lassitude before these heaps of writings he adds in ink on his own copy, after the word 'variety': 'et a tant dit', 'and has said so much'. The words strangely resemble the notorious exordium to the first section of La Bruyère's *Characters*: 'Tout est dit, et l'on vient trop tard', 'Everything is said, and we come too late'. In this classic statement of belatedness, the conviction that *tout*, 'everything', has been said reduces the writer to 'gleaning after the ancients', which is bad enough; yet the vision of a philosophy which has said *tant*, 'so much', is far more terrible, since one is in danger of being overwhelmed by the unending profusion of writing.

The most moving expression of this unease is to be found in the essay on vanity. Already well advanced into his third book, Montaigne wonders how he could ever stop writing, 'since Diomedes filled six thousand books with just one subject, grammar'. The situation, moreover, can only become worse: 'What must prattling produce, when the mere lisping and first loosening of the tongue smothered the world under such a horrifying burden of books?' Montaigne himself is smothered by the horrifying burden, and might well repeat in his own name the lament of the Preacher of Ecclesiastes to which his chapter title makes reference: 'vanity of vanities; all is vanity'. 'Vain', indeed, is a word which constantly recurs in the *Essays*, having been introduced in the preface and in the first essay, in the description of 'man' already quoted, as 'a subject marvellously vain, diverse, and undulating'. It often has its abyssal biblical meaning. And since he is dealing here with books and with 'écrivaillerie', 'scribbling', he seems to allude not to the beginning but to the end of Ecclesiastes, where the author, having repeated his refrain for the last time, continues (in chapter 12, verse 12): 'Faciendi plures libros nullus est finis', in the version Montaigne would have read, or in the Authorised Version: 'of making many books there is no end'. There, surely, is Montaigne's greatest anxiety, and it is a saying which might oppress any writer, a thought not for taking or leaving, or for investigating with scholarly detachment, but for undergoing as a

real problem and maybe a great sorrow. Montaigne chose the only form which seemed adequate to the vision of writing as having no end and as being unable to reach completion and to conclude: a stream of chimerical essays, a fantastical proliferation of 'attempts'. There also is the underlying pain of the question which he asks of the reader, with a seeming and deliberately unseemly jauntiness, immediately after having referred to the biblical teaching on vanity: 'Who cannot see that I have taken a path along which, without cease and without labour, I shall continue for as long as there are ink and paper in the world?' Montaigne finds even greater difficulty in finishing than in beginning, and one sees that the difficulty cannot be resolved, except in death. To read the preface 'To the reader' after having met with the limitless disquiet of the essay on vanity is to understand at a different level the airy manner in which he advises the reader not to read the book which follows, and takes leave of him ('Therefore, adieu') not at the end but before even the beginning of his work.

* * *

'Of making many books there is no end', says Ecclesiastes, 'and much study is a weariness of the flesh'. The end of the phrase likewise resounds dully through this essay of Montaigne's, and it recurs three centuries later as the opening of Mallarmé's poem 'Brise Marine': 'La chair est triste, hélas! et j'ai lu tous les livres', 'The flesh is sad, alas! and I have read all books'. The whole sentence is highly appropriate, in fact, to the *Decadence*, to that growing suspicion that European civilisation was exhausted, having deteriorated like the later Roman empire on the eve of the barbarian invasions. The suspicion was voiced by Barbey d'Aurevilly in words that Montaigne might have written, when describing Huysmans' novel *A Rebours* as the expression of a race 'at its last hour'. It permeates *The Waste Land*.

I wonder how many readers have noticed that the final chapter of Ecclesiastes is present at the beginning and at the end of Eliot's poem. Eliot himself indicates in a note that the cricket which, in line 23, gives 'no relief' is to be associated with the grasshopper of Ecclesiastes 12: 5, which 'shall be a burden'. The reference introduces one to the whole of that final chapter, with its disclosure of the gifts reserved for age. The cricket is found among a 'heap of broken images', itself an image for history as it appears to a

decomposing civilisation, for the structure of Eliot's own poem, and also, given the presence of Ecclesiastes, for the accumulation of books, which is unending and which is not merely alluded to but enacted in the poem itself, line by line. The final spilling of quotations in the last paragraph of the poem is introduced by a question: 'Shall I at least set my lands in order?' which may certainly refer to Isaiah's injunction: 'Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die' (38: 1) but which also recalls, and with equal aptness, the claim of Ecclesiastes, likewise at the end of his work, to have 'set in order many proverbs' (12: 9). *The Waste Land* too is a compilation of many sayings, of fragments shored against ruins; less a compendium of maxims, however, than a dictionary of received ideas.

Ecclesiastes 12 even seems to underlie other moments of the opening and closing sections of Eliot's poem, sometimes as a distant voice behind more immediate ones. The character who reads, 'much of the night' (line 18) could well know the weariness that comes from 'much study'. The 'handful of dust' (line 30), which enters from a meditation of John Donne's, is attended by a 'fear' evoked by the Preacher (verse 5) when thinking of our dust reverting to the earth (verse 7). The cricket returns as a cicada in line 353, and will reappear, moreover, in the second part of *Ash-Wednesday*, in the more recognisable guise of a 'grasshopper' with a 'burden': the last chapter of Ecclesiastes was to continue to haunt Eliot. Finally, the 'voices singing out of empty cisterns and exhausted wells' (line 384), which recall passages in Proverbs (5: 15) and Jeremiah (2: 13), also echo the preacher's vision of 'the pitcher . . . broken at the fountain' and 'the wheel broken at the cistern' (verse 6). As in the case of Montaigne, the Preacher's lament about the making of books is not referred to, only many details in the verses which precede it; yet the whole chapter lies as a kind of palimpsest under the beginning and the end of a poem which contemplates in some affliction the 'empty cisterns' and the 'exhausted wells' of history, of civilisation, of writing.

For Eliot certainly experienced the past, at least in his poems, as a dispirited agglomeration, while the present was in ruins for him even more than it had been for Montaigne. His point is made, with a profound sarcasm which he causes to return against himself, in the epigraph from Petronius. A Sibyl, who has received the gift of a quasi-endless life but has neglected to ask for the gift of youth, replies to the question: 'Sibyl, what do you want?' with, 'I want to

die'. It has often been pointed out that the Sibyl at Cumae wrote her oracles, under the inspiration of Apollo, on leaves which the wind might scatter, and that *The Waste Land* resembles a dispersal of oracular but now illegible fragments. The Sibyls are also, however, in ancient tradition, the very first poets, and *The Waste Land* is the last dispersal of their writing. The tradition of European poetry, which cannot end but which grows progressively older, seeks to die in the work of Eliot.

This adds a further complexity to the poem's opening phrase, the one everybody remembers: 'April is the cruellest month'. (It is not, in fact the whole of the first line, which needs to be completed for one to receive the full shock: 'April is the cruellest month, breeding'.) The motive for reversing the opening of *The Canterbury Tales*, whose details continue to filter into Eliot's poem for several lines, is in part literary, or better, writerly. April is 'cruel', in this perspective, because it urges writing on an unwilling writer; it mixes 'memory and desire' and stirs the 'dull roots'. Faced with a poetic tradition which aspires to death, and in the absence of the inspiration which comes into Chaucer's poem with the 'sweet breath' of Zephirus, Eliot does not want to write, and overwhelms the beginning of his poem with a desire not to begin. He does *need* to write, of course, and there is a poem clamouring to be born; yet the need is cruel, since it obliges him to confront a surfeit of texts and even to add to them. Can he start, in fact? It is not a question of priority, of resentment that someone else has got there before him, but of dejection, of bewilderment, at the lack of a beginning, that is, of a place where his work could begin, since origin itself is hidden, not behind any particular writer but behind so many works already in existence.

In a sense, Eliot does not begin: in the published version of the poem, he leaves that to someone else. (In the typescript too he copies out phrases from Malory, Conrad, Dickens and the Book of Common Prayer, along with his name, before risking words of his own, the first one being 'First'.) And the choice of Chaucer is in no way arbitrary. Chaucer can be taken as representing the beginning of modern English poetry, Dryden having called him, in a famous phrase, 'the father of English poetry', and in seeking his first words in the first words of the father, so as to denature them, Eliot goes back, as it were, to the beginning of the beginning. The opening of *The Canterbury Tales* had already been quoted, moreover, in the opening lines of Spenser's 'Prothalamion' (itself

cited in *The Waste Land*), Pope's 'Temple of Fame', and Wordsworth's *Prelude*, which had also found their starting point in the initial start. Eliot enters into contact with Chaucer and also with the history of English verse.

He begins, like Montaigne, by immersing himself in the multiplicity and contrariety of books, and he will continue through the poem being obsessed with beginnings. Has it been observed that many of the passages which he appropriates through a similar 'filching' (or, to use his own term, 'stealing') are themselves the openings of the works from which they are lifted? He tries time and again to reach origin, to discover the places where other writers have managed to situate their beginnings: he quotes the first song of Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* (in lines 31–4), the opening page of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (from line 266), the liminary poem of Baudelaire's *Fleurs du Mal* (line 76). Even when he takes from minor works, like those of Rupert Brooke and Charles-Louis Philippe which are also crammed into his first three lines, he goes to the first words or to chapter one.

The poem is even a review of beginnings. It gathers into itself the beginnings of a poem (Brooke's 'The Old Vicarage, Grantchester'), of a long poem (*The Canterbury Tales*), of a book of poetry (*Les Fleurs du Mal*), of a narrative (*Heart of Darkness*), of an opera (*Tristan and Isolde*), of a play (through the sub-title, or pre-beginning, of *The Spanish Tragedy* in line 431), and of a prophecy (Ezekiel). It returns to the beginnings of English poetry (Chaucer); of poetry itself (the Sibyl); of literature, since the last text quoted is an Upanishad, which is a later addition to a Veda and therefore associated with some of the world's oldest literary works; and of language, or at least of Indo-European language, for Sanskrit, the last language quoted, is the oldest of the group to which all the others belong. The poem works continually backwards, pressing through history and time in search of the places where a first event has occurred. It even contrives to catch sight of Eden, to contemplate the beginning of beginnings. The garden, however, is lost as soon as found, for the 'sylvan scene' of origin (line 98) as quoted from *Paradise Lost* (IV 140) falls under the gaze there not of God, or of Adam and Eve, but of Satan, at the moment when he is preparing to destroy it. Eliot may have felt himself quite close to Milton in this, despite his well known antipathy, for Milton too commits himself through his own epic to the tormented search for a beginning of the world and of writing. The loss of Eden can

mean, for the writer, the loss of a place for beginning, the vanishing of an unsullied somewhere where he might see with a pristine vision and speak with a language still fresh. So Eliot's own beginning involves a distortion of Chaucer, and he fills his poem with failures to speak. In only the twentieth line someone hears the beginning of God's call to Ezekiel: 'Son of man . . . I will speak unto thee . . . and thou shalt say unto . . . the children of Israel . . .', but once again the inspiration (Ezekiel is filled with the spirit) is absent, and having begun the quotation Eliot negates it, by a vertiginous ellipsis and use of the line break: 'Son of man, / You cannot say'. And the reason one 'cannot say' is precisely that one only knows the 'heap of broken images', the remnants of other people's sayings, being the bearer of no message to deliver.

The horror of beginning continues into the horror of continuing. No doubt I exaggerate; but I am trying to grasp something very dark in the actual writing of the poem which might account for its violence, and for the near-hysteria moving through its lines, a hysteria concealed but also exacerbated by the perfection of intellectual control. Eliot has to develop a poem from a fraught beginning, and against an unwillingness to add further to the accumulation of many books. He resolves the question once again radically, by multiplying allusions to the works of the past – by 'keeping a register' of them in such a way as to render them inept – and by elaborating a multiple story, crowded with a confusing variety of types of narrative. He deals with the works of the past by taking them along with him. His poem is, among other things, an inventory of English poetry from Chaucer, which he quotes in 'pieces' and continually incapacitates. Most of the great voices speak, or stammer, in *The Waste Land*, as well as many smaller ones, and the author most often quoted, and represented by the widest range of his writings, appropriately is Shakespeare. The many kinds of story: Grail legend, descent into hell, perambulation around London, voyage to Jerusalem, esoteric tale spelled out by the Tarot, ritual death-and-resurrection, autobiography, erotic encounter, Antarctic expedition, and so on, similarly tangle into each other and, for a diversity of reasons, fail, in a kind of waste land of narrative. The poem even tells over again, though from a great distance, Chaucer's own story; one could even say, I hope without over-indulging a formula which I have already used, that *The Waste Land* is Eliot's *Canterbury Tales*. The first English poem and the latest both begin in April, both leave London, and a

London pub, on a pilgrimage towards the East, whether Canterbury or India, the latter being reached grosso modo via the Thames estuary, Europe and the Middle East, and both become collections of different voices and varied stories, which seem as numerous in Eliot's short poem as in Chaucer's extensive tale. Whereas the stories in Chaucer are clearly framed and developed, those in *The Waste Land* rise brokenly to the surface and disappear.

Eliot retells, burlesquely, the father's tale, which he also extends far beyond the frontiers of England and of English literature, so as to reach the historical and geographical limits of our civilisation, and to make his poem the story of the writings, the mythologies, the rivers, the cities, the languages, the inhabitants, of the world from our perspective: almost, a history of the world. He huddles together the débris of the works of the past, and indicates their survival, at the beginning and at the end, as 'broken images' and 'fragments'. (These are also derisions of his own poem, which have become familiar to us, along with the 'bits of nonsense' and the 'fruitless poetry' suggested by the contexts of, once again, the epigraph and the last line but two, and I note in passing that they are actually less derisive than the terms Montaigne finds for the *Essays*, which include, again in the essay on vanity, 'the excrements of an ageing mind'.) After the 'more than seven thousand years in which there have been men', to take up La Bruyère's sentence where we left off, 'and they have thought', writing is always a re-writing. To write a work is to re-write another, or many others, or to re-write, for example, a poetic form, like the sonnet, or a literary tradition, like epic. The writer cannot shake himself free of the writings of others, however much he may wish to believe himself new and alone. *The Waste Land* is the fundamental work here, since it throws re-writing into high relief and takes it as far as it will go, its ambition being to re-write, as it were, all writing. Its perspective is dismay (which is not the only perspective available), and hence its fascination. One cannot escape from this poem, from these seventeen pages, since it is unique, *sui generis*, and since it disturbs our relations with all other works. It is a kind of catastrophe of literature (as of history); it collapses poetry, narrative, writing, into itself. *The Waste Land* is not exactly a poem crafted in such a way that each quotation, occurring at the opportune moment, contributes to an unfolding meaning or serves as a device for irony. Neither is it, as more recent approaches suggest, the writing out of a personal nightmare in which the quotations are used only for

their power to concentrate an emotion. The quotations do serve the nightmare, but they are also part of the nightmare, which is partly the vision of a horrific spawning of texts.

This poem tormented, it seems, by the need to write and also by the sadness of writing, includes glimpses of ineffectual writers. Twice an I-figure recalls being on a bank and 'fishing in the dull canal' (line 189) or sitting 'upon the shore/Fishing' (lines 423–4). He may be the Fisher King, but isn't he also Eliot or any writer, fishing for poems in a place become unpropitious? On the first occasion, the line: 'By the waters of Leman I sat down and wept . . .' (line 182) – which impersonates for him, by adapting the opening verse of Psalm 137, the voice of an Israelite taken into captivity – also represses the burden of writing twice over. It hides, behind 'Leman', the name of Babylon which is also Babel, and it halts rather than remember subsequent verses in the psalm about hanging harps upon the willows and about not being able to sing the Lord's song in a strange land. On that occasion too, the speaker is also 'Musing', he hears things 'at [his] back', and what he hears are poems by Marvell and Day and Verlaine. On the second, he has an 'arid plain' behind him, over which there sounds a medley of works from Dante to Kyd. Behind him is the literary past ('the gashouse' in line 190 may just possibly be a way of describing it), but in front is only his own impotence, which is more than sexual. The sounds he hears on the latter occasion are also the end of the poem, which decomposes into a series of quotations in several languages, and one notes that if Eliot has difficulty in beginning and in continuing, he also has difficulty in finishing. How can he finish, when writing, like thoughts and beliefs, is endless? In a way he doesn't: he leaves others to finish for him, and one needs also to note that each one of these quotations refers to writing. The line from Dante describes the troubadour poet Arnaut Daniel, while the line from Nerval presents Nerval himself as the melancholy heir of the troubadours. The anonymous Latin author of the 'Pervigilium Veneris', a celebration of the return of spring and of its birdsong, which responds, from the other end of the poem, to Chaucer's General Prologue, is quoted at the moment when he wonders if he will be able himself to break silence, having been abandoned by the Muse and by Apollo. (To underscore the 'perfection of intellectual control' in the midst of disarray, the loss of Apollo responds to something even earlier, to the wasted Sibyl of the epigraph.) 'O swallow swallow' is from a song which the

Prince in Tennyson's *The Princess* has composed himself and sings, and which is greeted with mocking laughter in part because his voice 'Rang false' (IV 103). Hieronymo, finally, is quoted from Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* at the point when he conceives the idea of writing a play in sundry languages. Eliot hears snatches from the poetry of the past, when that poetry is itself meditating on poetic failure or success.

The most interesting of the poem's poets, however, is Tiresias. Tiresias is the blind prophet who can see further than others, and what he sees, according to Eliot in a note, is 'the substance of the poem'. Yet he intervenes even less than in Sophocles, being reduced to a 'mere spectator', and when he tells one of the poem's tales, the anecdote about the typist and the small house agent's clerk, it is rather as a *voyeur*, or as if the actions were taking place in his head. Tiresias is the poet of a civilisation at its last hour. He has seen everything and known everything, like the writer in the twentieth century who has access to all human experience gathered into the world's libraries. He can even 'foretell' and 'foresuffer' everything (lines 229 and 243), not through the power of divination but because the world repeats itself, and what has been is what shall be.

Like Montaigne, Eliot continually enters his poem as someone who does not know how to write. This gives to Tiresias, I believe, another kind of significance. Eliot has drawn him mainly from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and the *Metamorphoses* is another compendium of stories, in which Ovid too pillages the works of his predecessors, but it is also a poem free from worry (or at least from the kind of worry which I am discussing), and which has no difficulty in beginning and ending. Rather the contrary, in fact: the final lines declare that the work is complete, and that neither Jupiter's anger, nor fire, nor sword, nor time, will be able to destroy it, while the opening lines, which are astonishing, call on the gods to draw out an unbroken thread of verse telling of the metamorphoses which have occurred from the earliest beginnings of the world down to the present. The extraordinary ambition of the *Metamorphoses* is to bind time and the whole world into a book, by penetrating to origin and gradually joining it to the present of the writer. *The Waste Land* refers to the work on a number of occasions, through the stories of Philomela and also, seemingly, of Hyacinthus and Actaeon, and the notes declare that the Tiresias of the *Metamorphoses* stands at the very centre and permeates the

whole. *Metamorphoses* is in a way the poem most distant from *The Waste Land*, and also the one of which it seems most envious.

There is another writer behind Eliot's poem, Shakespeare, whose presence reveals a rather different dimension to the work, which I should not want to neglect. It is clear that the author of *Hamlet*, and of *Hamlet* specifically, gripped Eliot from early in his life and, as one knows, the play enters the opening poem of his first collection, 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' (as does Ecclesiastes). It intervenes at the profoundest level. The speaker of the poem refers to streets that follow like an argument 'To lead you to an overwhelming question', before breaking off abruptly with: 'Oh, do not ask, "What is it?"' The later mention of Hamlet ('No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be'), with its partial quotation of his most famous words, suggests a reply to the enquiry that one has been enjoined not to make: 'To be, or not to be, that is the question'. It is a question deeper than the one I am considering, though a lower stratum of the same anguish, and it underlies all Eliot's early poetry, being clearly felt in the epigraph to *The Waste Land*. Eliot was also interested, however, in the experience of Shakespeare the man as evidenced in the play. In his 1919 essay on 'Hamlet and his Problems', which has often been examined, he sees the play as full of 'some stuff' which the writer 'could not drag to light', since he was attempting to express 'the inexpressibly horrible'. The phrase recalls Conrad, and one remembers that the original epigraph to *The Waste Land* was a passage from *Heart of Darkness* ending in Kurtz's cry, 'the horror! the horror!' which Eliot removed only with reluctance. He uses the word often, in fact, and in a much later essay on Tourneur, of 1930, he refers to the latter's characters also as projections from 'some horror beyond words'. He also assumes in Shakespeare an 'intense feeling, ecstatic or terrible, without an object or exceeding its object', such as every person of sensibility has known but which the ordinary person suppresses. The artist, on the other hand, 'keeps it alive by his ability to intensify the world to his emotions', and one sees that 'the artist' has taken over from 'Shakespeare', and would naturally refer to Eliot as well. (The Tourneur essay too will refer to 'the intensity of the vision of . . . ecstasies or horrors' which may come to an adolescent.) The most revealing passage in the Hamlet essay, however, may be the following: 'The levity of Hamlet, his repetition of phrase, his puns, are not part of a deliberate plan of dissimulation, but a form of emotional relief. In

the character Hamlet it is the buffoonery of an emotion which can find no outlet in action; in the dramatist it is the buffoonery of an emotion which he cannot express in art'. Hamlet's buffoonery, yes; but Shakespeare's? For Eliot to have written of Shakespeare's buffoonery of an emotion at the inexpressibly horrible just two years before the first assembling and composing of *The Waste Land*, incites one to look in the poem for a similar combination of buffooning and horror. It is surely there. It is the more insidious reason for our fascination by the work. Like the *mal* of the queen in Racine's *Phèdre* (her evil, hurt, and sickness), *The Waste Land vient de plus loin*, 'comes from further away', and from further down, from a passage through horror, a kind of possession, an experience of 'some stuff' which could not be known, and which needed to appear not in the clarity of order but in a ravelling of fragments, confusing, mocking, slightly mad. *The Waste Land* exists at an extreme edge of literature, like *Hamlet* itself, like *Heart of Darkness* (but more so: it is what *Heart of Darkness* might have looked like had it been told by Kurtz rather than Marlow), like the fourth part of *Gulliver's Travels*, or the fourth book of *The Dunciad*.

And Eliot seems to have found something of this in Montaigne. At the end of a review of a book on Shakespeare's debt to Montaigne written three years after *The Waste Land* (for the *Times Literary Supplement* of 24 December 1925), he sees the Frenchman as influencing 'that mysterious and horrifying group of plays which includes *Hamlet* as well as *Measure for Measure* and *Troilus*'. (He also alludes to Shakespeare's 'internal history', and, revealingly, to 'that internal crisis over which our imagination is tempted to brood too long'.) At the end of the 1919 essay on *Hamlet* (also a review), after the discussion of ecstasy, terror, horror and also disgust, he adds that 'we should like to know' if and in what circumstances Shakespeare had read Montaigne's 'Apologie de Raimond Sebond'. It is the circumstances in which Eliot himself read the essay which might interest us, along with the suggestion that Montaigne's work too is deeply disturbed.

* * *

Much else has to be said. One needs to look at the ways in which both Montaigne and Eliot attempt to overcome the excessiveness of history and the disintegration of the present. The *Essays* do explore a number of fundamental themes: death, but also virtue,

and happiness, with a positive end in view; they do dredge the works of the past for a kind of wisdom, partial and fragmentary yet real; they lead, in the last words of the final chapter, to a certain serenity in the face of old age, under the protection of Apollo, the 'gay and sociable' god. There is even, in this final chapter, a breath-taking addition in Montaigne's own hand which discovers serenity, and more, in the very endlessness of thought and of writing. He had originally said: 'There is no end to our searches; our end is in the next world. The pursuits of the human mind are without conclusion and without shape; its nourishment is doubt and ambiguity. Which is what Apollo was telling us, speaking always doubly, obscurely and obliquely, not satisfying us but beguiling us and keeping us busy'. The alteration removes the lingering unquiet, and changes the force of the word 'ambiguity':

> There is no end to our searches; our end is in the next world. It is a sign of shrinking power when the mind is content, or of weariness. No generous spirit stays within itself: it aspires constantly and reaches further than its capacity; it is impelled beyond whatever it achieves; if it does not advance and press forward and gather strength and dispute with itself, it is only half alive; its pursuits are without conclusion, and without shape; its nourishment is wonder, the chase, ambiguity. Which is what Apollo was telling us, speaking always doubly, obscurely and obliquely, not satisfying us but beguiling us and keeping us busy.

Even the lesson of Apollo is transformed, one sees, without any change in the words which declare it. The image of a mind whose nourishment is 'wonder, the chase, ambiguity', is one to meditate.

As for *The Waste Land*, it does make distinctions of value among the events it recounts and the passages it quotes, and it advances, albeit with a continuing suspicion and raillery, towards, it is true, a final deranged utterance and a catastrophe of books, but also towards hints of an escape from hell, and of purgation. Eliot even discovers, if not the word, the syllable of beginning: 'DA', and through an interlingual pun *simple comme un bonjour* which passes from Sanskrit to Russian, the syllable signifies acceptance: 'da', 'yes'. We shall also move on eventually to *Four Quartets*, and study the way it re-writes and, as it were, redeems *The Waste Land*, partly

in the interest of a more affable and gracious commerce with the works and writers of the past.

For quite other perspectives are, of course, possible, and they are supplied, in the periods of Montaigne and Eliot, by Rabelais and Joyce. I could even have begun this chapter: 'The joy of writing is partly that so many others have already written'. But I have chosen to concentrate here on the dismay that the making of many books can occasion: on the 'vanity' of writing, and on the experience of creative distress. I have wanted to pause on that long enough for it to be able to make itself felt, and I have wanted to avoid neutralising and indeed trivialising it by too quickly opening the door.

2

Likeness

We know that *origin* is one of our most urgent concerns from the fact that we are surrounded by texts which affirm the foolishness of looking for it. One discipline which seems to have escaped the universal suspicion is cosmology, and it may be no coincidence that our imagination of genesis, as indeed of apocalypse, has taken refuge in a science capable of satisfying it most dramatically. A poet – since poetry is my subject – is unlikely to be moved, as far as his own craft is concerned, by anything as vivid as a Big Bang; but he may well yearn for an origin of language, or rather, for a language of origin: for a word which stands at the beginning, and gives, or receives, a world fresh and alert with futurity. In this, he is a helpless regressive, who keeps alive a desire to rub down words until one reaches their core; to discover them so young that they are inseparable from an experience which they do not yet have to 'express' or 'represent'; a desire to breathe with the word 'breath', or rise with the word 'rise', or bathe in the word 'water'. For this reason we have theories about language whose ambition, whatever the coolness of their logic, is to attain at the least a hypothetical moment of beginning. The onomatopœic theory supposes a beginning where, if a word cannot *be* a thing, it can sound exactly like it. An origin in cries suggests a language so spontaneously close to emotion or the senses as to convey them from within. An origin in commands would have language accompanying the first stirrings of self-conscious human intercourse. The only thing wrong with such theories is that we cannot believe them; and even if we could, they do what all theories of origin do: they raise its possibility only, simultaneously, to whisk us away from it, into a language (like that of the person writing out the theory) where any traces of origin are, in sentence after sentence, totally overlaid. Hence also, at times, a hope that etymology might lead, as a reward for arduous philological labour, to a secure and original meaning, to the *real* sense of a word; a hope which merely precedes the realisation that there is nothing more real about an early meaning than a late, and that every word eventually reduces to apparently pointless sounds and marks.

Etymology does not give origin, it gives history. One might surmise, indeed, that there *is* history, and historical writing, only because origin is lost; or, if that sounds too metaphysical, because it is possible to think origin in a human world from which origin is absent.

Hence also, to come closer to what concerns me here, that way of viewing rhetoric, or rather, the area of rhetoric concerned with figures, which sees figures as deviations from the usual or everyday meanings of words. I don't know that anyone would hold this view now; it is sanctioned by Aristotle, and was law in the Structuralism of the 1960s. It is interesting in its more extreme form, where the existence of figurative meanings is taken to prove the existence of literal meanings which are proper to words. The theory provides both the pleasure of finding meanings which are native, and primitive – of finding, that is, origins which are still with us even now and located, moreover, in the most ordinary kind of discourse; and the supplementary pleasure of discovering forms of language which play over against that original language with a certain freedom of speculation. All strong theories, after all, even those which one rejects and those which are actually disproved, are interesting for what they reveal about the desires which invest them. I say this now to make clear that I do not suppose that any ideas I shall be developing somehow escape from the figuration of desire, as if they were uttered from some neutral high ground.

It is difficult, now, not to think that all language is figurative, and that there is no word prior to figuration, in existence before the displacement. Even the word *figurative* is figurative, since it refers to the 'face' of language; just as the word *metaphor* is a metaphor, or the word *oxymoron*, an oxymoron. The simplest statement is always already figurative; and one might say that the figures which teem in our speech are the ways in which, overtly or covertly, reality appears to us. They are the myriad faces of reality. This is not, first off, good news to a poet, since it excludes him definitively from any pristine world where words and things are original, lit with a common light, naked in front of each other and not ashamed. And yet that distance, that difference, between the sense of a language of origin and the late-coming language that we have – indeed, the very notions of distance and difference – may be just what, for the making of poery, we need; and the un-original, figurative state of language perhaps tells us larger things,

such as that reality is un-original and figurative, or that we ourselves are un-original figures.

One of the many figures which involves distance is comparison, and I shall consider it first in terms of a poet of the Renaissance. Strangely, the Renaissance and the Romantic period, which are arguably the most innovative phases in English poetry, divide sharply on the question of rhetoric. The first was strongly rhetorical, while the second, to simplify somewhat, refused rhetoric, and saw rhetoric decline and disappear after something like twenty-three centuries of influence. One ought to add, however, about the Romantics, that it seems to have been precisely their alienation from a rhetorical tradition no longer of use to them that turned their attention to the possible meaning of certain of the figures. They do after all have their own deliberately limited repertory of figures, and they see in them – in metaphor, analogy, 'affinity', 'correspondence' – depths of philosophical significance. When Shelley declared, in *A Defence of Poetry*, that language is 'vitally metaphoric', he both effaced most of the history of rhetoric and renewed the understanding of figures. Perhaps one ought simply to say that, in the terms which are relevant to it, Romanticism is the other great rhetorical phase of our poetry. By linking certain key tropes to the new thought and so investing them with semantic depth, Romanticism could even be seen as recovering, at least in essence, the ancient union of rhetoric and philosophy. Certainly it changed the lights, and I mention it since I am working within its influence. My concern too is not for rhetoric as teaching and moving, nor primarily for rhetoric as delighting, but for the ontology of rhetoric.

In the first line of Sonnet 18: 'Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?' Shakespeare draws attention to a rhetorical term. Or rather he doesn't: he uses an everyday verb, and it is only when one has followed through the strange un-logic of the poem, and taken the shock of its unstated meanings, that one returns to the word and to its rhetorical, ontological force. What could be simpler, however, than Sonnet 18?

> Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
> Thou art more lovely and more temperate.
> Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
> And summer's lease hath all too short a date.

Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimmed;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance or nature's changing course untrimmed.
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st,
Nor shall Death brag thou wand'rest in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st.
  So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
  So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

Is it not a poem comparing a young person to a summer's day? A summer's day has faults: it is less 'lovely' and less 'temperate', since 'rough winds' shake its buds, and the sun sometimes shines too hot and is sometimes dimmed by clouds. The comparison is clearly to the advantage of the young person. The other defect of summer, which enters at the end of each of the quatrains, seems to be absorbed into the comparison quite comfortably. It is the defect of time, and its first appearance can indeed be dealt with: summer's lease has 'all too short a date' whereas, we have no difficulty in concluding, the blooming youth of a young person will last many summers. The following lines, however, are too much for the rhetoric's logic: 'And every fair from fair sometime declines, / By chance or nature's changing course untrimmed'. The reader might at this point be reflecting that the 'fairness' of the young person also will eventually decline as he too, or she too, is at length 'untrimmed', if not by chance then certainly by nature; but he is not allowed to, since the movement of the poem takes him to the declaration that the addressee's eternal summer will not fade, because it will remain forever within this sonnet. We are still in rhetoric, and the effect of this hyperbolic movement is to gloss over the fact that the comparison has broken down. The logic of: 'You are *not* like a summer's day because you are *more* lovely, etc.' has ridden over the suppressed logic of: 'You are like a summer's day, because you too will fade and die'. To realise this is to see that the poem has for its subject not only poetry, which it refers to explicitly, but comparison itself. It is a poem *about* comparison, comparison not only as a figure of speech but as a figure of the real.

As a figure of the real, why is comparison so appealing? Why do we like 'like'? 'Shall I compare?' says the poet. Please do, we

reply; we can hardly imagine anything more agreeable. There must be many reasons for this double liking, which etymology seems to know about, incidentally, since there is a link between the two words. In our everyday similes we place alongside each other, or one over the other, something which is probably in our immediate experience and something from the past. What is from the past is coloured by our present perspective on to it. The past does not merely return, as in an act of inert remembering: it reappears new, and part of the reason for our pleasure, a reason we are unlikely to formulate, is that we have changed the past. The present is modified also. It is no longer a surface. It has been deepened with time, has been hugely or slightly transformed, and the work has been performed by a memory become creative.

At the least, a simile is a sign that we are alive, and a sign of the possibilities of that aliveness. For it also brings into play, often, the present and the absent. The absent is made present by its association with what is before us; the present is altered by the association. The experience of the simile itself is of a kind of other dimension, a virtual world to which, very simply, we have gained access. This young girl is like a small sea-bird, but *where* she is 'like' is no longer here in the garden.

We advance holding language in front of us, like a small torch. And if our own rhetorical competence can give us so much, what we may expect from a poet, or rather from his poems, is even more: a likening more rich, more consistent, and of course surprising. The Romantic explanation of this effect, in terms not only of individual psychology but, to use the rude word again, of metaphysics, was that comparison binds together a scattered world. If anyone knows a better explanation I should be glad to hear it. As comparison reveals the 'like', however, it also, at the same time, reveals the 'unlike'. From the beginning the simile, the metaphor, have been understood as manoeuvring these two contradictory notions. When things are brought powerfully into relation we see their similarity and we see their difference. It is with the meaning of this difference, of this difference which is also a similarity, that I am concerned here.

'Shall I compare?' It is the poet's question. It is where poetry begins. But in this poem it is almost a rhetorical question. 'Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?' has to have a positive answer, to be sure, since the comparison has already been made within the question itself. We might stop the poem at this point, and

what we should take away, into our own experience, would be the rightness of seeing an admired or loved person in terms of the emotions raised, the physical and aesthetic pleasure provided, the thought of plenitude and perfection evoked, by a day in summer. By continuing in the way it does, however, the poem modifies its opening line. 'Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?' Well, no, I shalln't: you are more this, and more that, and besides, consider all the differences. Indeed, the question is not *almost* rhetorical: it is both a real question to which the answer is 'yes', I do think of you in terms of a season, of the month of May, of the sun at its height, and a rhetorical question for which the comparison is beside the point. There is a difference, and for the moment the difference favours the person addressed. Yet the ease with which the rhetorical question rides over the real question is one of the facts which renders that difference disturbing.

And there is another difference, which shows in the fact that, while using the word 'compare', Shakespeare creates no actual comparisons. The person in the poem is not said to be 'like' May, his complexion is not described as being radiant 'as' the sun's. There are metaphors ('summer's lease'), a personification ('Nor shall Death brag'), and other figures if we choose to identify them. The whole poem is governed by rhetoric in a wider sense of the word, since, among other things, it corresponds to the rhetorical genre of epideictic, the literature of praise. But for Shakespeare to have announced comparison and not delivered comparisons as such may imply a deliberate withholding, as a way of drawing attention to the problem of 'like'.

And however that may be, it is right that the reader's attention should not be absorbed by specific figures, by moments in the poem, that is, where an overt working of language has been undertaken. For poetry reworks language throughout its length, even at the places which seem the least charged, or changed. It is difficult to realise this from the inside of a rhetorical tradition, especially when that part of rhetoric which deals with eloquence is privileged: a poem can then seem to be a stringing-together of a number of shifts from 'ordinary' language, held in place by pieces of language left untouched. Yet a moment's reflection on rhythm, for instance, and especially on metre, is enough to show that the demands of poetry on language are total. A poem resembles a foreign language in this respect. One is tempted to think that the sounds of French, say, are the same as those of English with a few

exceptions, such as the highly marked 'u' or the nasals; whereas further acqaintance, and a good ear, teach one that all the sounds of the French language differ from English, and that the whole of one's phonological system needs to be modified.

The language of a poem is like and also unlike the English language outside the poem. And this further difference is particularly probing, since while it may be possible to decide what the language of Shakespeare's poem is, it actually seems improbable that one could decide what English is outside the poem, or before it, or after it. A similar difference, and a similar elusiveness of the first term from which a difference is perceived, governs the relation in the poem between words and things. Here the difference is what we notice most: the expression 'the darling buds of May' is not much like the darling buds of May, and between the buds that we say, or hear, or read, and the buds that we see or touch or conceive, the difference is dimensional. The likeness, which exists in spite of the arbitrary nature of the sign, derives, or so I shall argue in a later chapter, from memory, from history, from customary association. One might even say, and Mallarmé did almost say it, that the work of poetry is to reinforce that likeness, to work language in such a way that it chimes with the real, rhymes with experience. The language of a poem is a kind of likeness of the world – it suggests the like-ness of world and language – where the difference, the distance, is also clarified. In this perspective such words as onomatopoeias and ejaculations are the least interesting, not the most. 'Plop' is like a stone falling into water, but it is too like it: the phonic element of the word and the sound of the contact of stone and water are very close, whereas the pleasure of 'like', the power of 'like', is in the conjunction of similarity and difference.

At least two further remarks need to be made about that difference. The first is that it is difficult to think the real before it has been articulated as language, and that we might wish, indeed, not to think it, and not to draw it into words. Poetry at such moments can appear as the enemy of living, and arts which appeal to the senses, and which are dumb with respect to language (painting, sculpture, music, architecture), and which seem even to quell, to sink language, may take on an irresistible appeal. I fancy that such moments are most likely to occur to poets (reflection will show that this is not the paradox it appears), and this is surely one way of understanding Keats's famous but also notorious cry,

'O for a Life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts!'[1] Not to think-speak gives at least the illusion of being in a world of origin.

The second remark goes in the opposite direction: the effect of language on things is not to leave them as they were. 'Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May' colours, changes, adds to, our sense of that season, and of those natural objects and activities. And do not these two remarks bear on what is surely the most mysterious word in the poem, mysterious in part for looking so obvious: the word 'thee'? I shall return to it, but would point out now that as an 'object' in the world, and in the world of the poem, 'thee' is perfectly elusive: it names a world as quietly as possible, as being, simply, what one addresses; the work of the poem is to give it colour and change.

* * *

Before going any further I should like to consider what is said about 'like' in the book of Genesis, which one might take simply as the expression of our most powerful sense of origin and of its loss. This will also serve to remind us that origin is indeed the context in which we are thinking about 'like'. Adam's naming of the animals in Genesis chapter 2 occurs in a context which it is easy to overlook. (I overlooked it when discussing the passage in *Towards a Christian Poetics*, though as far as I can see without harm to the argument.) Adam's naming is not only an exercise of his language in the world, tremendous though that is in itself. It is a very clearly directed search. Because it is not good that Adam should be alone, God intends to 'make him an help meet for him'. (The Vulgate translation is 'faciamus ei adiutorium *simile* sibi' – a help 'like' him.) It is in this light that God brings to him the 'beasts of the field' and the 'fowls of the air', to see what he will call them. So doesn't Adam as much call *to* them as call them, and is he not looking for someone he can name as being 'meet' for him, or like him? His names, in the terms of our grammar, are vocative; they relate to the second person rather than the third; they are varieties, one might say, of 'thee'. If Genesis allows lack, and need, in Eden, then this naming is impelled by the need, as it were, of the species, and seems to locate the source of 'like' in that original urgency. We know how the story continues: seeing that none of the beasts is like enough to Adam, God forms woman and according to the same expression used of the animals 'brings her' to him. He names

her (in a gesture whose offensiveness to feminists I hope I understand, though in different circumstances I should like not to leave the matter there) with the words: 'This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man'. They are, precisely, like and also different from each other. The Hebrew dubs them – with that wordplay which seems so deeply appropriate in a world said to be created by the Word – with two names, *Isha* and *Ish*, which are themselves alike and different.

The first act of human naming in Genesis concerns 'like'. The need in general, the search for the other, for some kind of similitude in difference, has meaning I think for poets, because it goes a long way to describing what poetry is about. In Sonnet 18 one might say that Shakespeare writes a whole poem so as to name 'thee', whose likeness, as it happens, is probably not related to sexual difference. The fact that one has to speculate here, and that one cannot actually assign with perfect confidence what we usually mean by a name – for example, 'the Earl of Southampton' – may well be a part of the poem's meaning.

Having let in some theology, I should like to push back yet further in Genesis to an even more remote source of 'like'. One might look for the very first thing that the book says about man, about us, maybe out of a purely secular interest: Genesis is quite an old text, and it has exercised some influence over our culture. One would discover that there too, quite astonishingly, it says 'like'. You will remember the famous words: 'And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness' (Genesis 1: 26). I have no Hebrew, but I note the emphasis given to the idea by the repetition, and I see that the New English Bible confirms the translation by using the same words. 'Image' and 'likeness': no, I find that I do not understand, though as I persist in looking at what the words seem to convey it does occur to me that to be able to understand them I should need to be in the position of Adam. It might then be possible to think of oneself, and of men and women, as 'like' God; whereas if one were looking for a sign of our distance from Adam, for a sign of the Fall, it would be there, with all its sad and glaring evidence, in the preposterousness of that thought. What one can pick up, however, as a deflowered piece of knowledge which we are still capable of grasping, is that what we *are* is comparisons. Our origin is similitude. We proceed from a figure. The matter from which we derive is dust, but the

idea from which we derive is likeness. This has all manner of consequences, the relevant one for the moment being that the primordial area of rhetoric concerned with likeness, and the perception and apperception which it enacts, are made possible, according to this reading of this text, by the terms in which the 'Adam' was made, by the relationship between men and God. We can compare in our world because we are ourselves comparisons with another.

One might bring down here the weight of Scholastic philosophy, but I am not sure that the idea of the *analogia entis*, the analogy of being, quite captures the sense of this relationship. (There is still a great deal to salute in the theory, for instance Aquinas's observation in *Distinctio* 35 that we are like God but that God is not like us.) The text seems to imply, rather, a kind of reversed figuration, in which, as I suggested in *Towards a Christian Poetics*, instead of God, or our descriptions of Him, being anthropomorphic, we ourselves are theomorphic. The universe would also seem to be ouranomorphic, and our experience of the world to be already figurative. The light we see figures the Light; the wind we feel, the Spirit; the words we speak, the Word. By the creation we are placed, as God's tropes, in a world of tropes, and by the Fall we are trapped there. We still have the figurative; we no longer have the literal, the real.

Hence the maybe dangerous fascination of the Vulgate version of 1 Corinthians 7: 31: 'praeterit enim figura huius mundi'. The Authorised Version gives 'for the fashion of this world passeth away', and the New English Bible 'For the whole frame of this world is passing away'. In neither case does one encounter rhetoric, and I presume that these translations are correct. Even when commenting on the Latin, in chapter 20 of *The City of God*, Augustine seems to understand 'figura' not as a figure but as a changeable, non-intrinsic, aspect, which he contrasts with 'natura': 'Figura enim praeterit, non natura'. Yet the Vulgate spurs one to look at the original Greek and, marvellously against expectation, one finds *schēma*, a word used in rhetoric and translated by English rhetoricians as 'scheme'. Himself learned in rhetoric, could St Paul possibly be meaning that the *figure* of this world will pass away: that this world will pass away as figure to give place to this world as reality?

* * *

It is with these suggestions in mind that I shall return to Shakespeare, and ask once again why it is that we like comparing. Sonnet 18 will then offer an answer of some magnitude. For what is the Bard doing here if not comparing the young man to summer so that, by the very act of comparison, he can give him eternal life? 'But thy eternal summer shall not fade . . . So long as men can breathe or eyes can see, / So long lives this, and this gives life to thee'. Well, of course: to immortalise in verse is something of a Renaissance commonplace – Shakespeare was not alone in this – Ronsard had already done as much for Hélène. It is part of the period's exuberance about poetry, about language, to be contrasted, in some surprise, with Montaigne's on the contrary melancholic approach: his undermining of language, and in particular his scorning of the text, of its ability even to be itself, given its need for unending and unendable interpretation. While Montaigne operates yet another dissolution of origin, Ronsard, Shakespeare and others establish pieces of writing which are set to transcend the future. But before retreating into scholarship, it is as well to ask just what Shakespeare is claiming to do, and what we think of it.

Who is being given life? In terms of reference, we know that we do not know. A 'Mr. W. H.' perhaps, according to the printer's dedication of the sonnets, but as a wearer of immortality that is a name of almost Kafka-esque slimness. And when we have followed the attempts to fill out the initials, into William Herbert, or Henry Wriothesley, or whoever else, we may come back to the poem and realise that we already have the name: 'thou', 'thee'. What 'thou' means is not this or that proper noun; it means, surely, by what it does. 'Thou' is the world addressed, or, more particularly, it is the addressing of the world in the person of someone like us, in the figure of love. It is the second person and not the third which is the 'object' of the poem, and the work of the poem is, very precisely, to 'compare *thee*', and to 'give life to *thee*'. Are not the two activities, moreover, one and the same? The addressee of the poem is not rendered immortal through having been mentioned by the immortal Shakespeare, since as a matter of fact he is not mentioned; he, or she, is no more than X. 'Thou' is given life by being compared, by entering a world of correspondences founded by the poem. 'Thou' is like, and unlike, a summer's day; summer itself is like a human tenant whose lease is short, while the sun is like a human face (or *figura*), with its shining 'eye' and its gold

'complexion'. The human and the natural are brought into relation, and 'thou' is richly haloed in 'day', and 'May', and 'heaven'. He is flattered above all by the comparison with the sun, the 'eye of heaven' (about which there are no doubt many more things to say), which governs the middle of the poem, and whose physical descent is tacitly compared to the figurative descending of each beautiful thing from its beautiful state: 'And every fair from fair sometime declines'.

'Thou' is drawn, line by line, into a whole world, of earth, and sky, of life and also of the 'shade' of death, and into the relations which, line by line, are created among them. It is 'this' which gives life, where 'this' means both the sonnet which Shakespeare is bringing to a close and whose reading we are just finishing, and also 'this' very act of comparing. To compare in a poem is to make a world, and to set it apart as something other than, say, a summer's day: to make of it a barely imaginable 'eternal summer'. Comparison is what immortalises, and one might then go on to say that what is immortalised is comparison.

It is the poem, as the poem says, which gives life. And this is not some daft claim that poetry can grant genuine immortality, and that the poet can play God. To use Yeats's expression, Shakespeare gathers 'thee' into the artifice of eternity. Perhaps the expression would be more justly reversed into the eternity of artifice. For art is the only 'eternity' – which means, here, a very long time – that a poet, even Shakespeare, can hope to control. He shows the poem, very carefully, as overcoming two adversaries, when he refers to beautiful things 'By chance or nature's changing course untrimmed'. The poem overcomes chance by the necessity of its metre and rhymes, by the choice of its syntactical patterns, by its ordered modulations of sound. It overcomes nature by that imagining of a season outside of seasons, of an 'eternal' summer. It surpasses natural 'lines' of descent, and maybe the 'life lines' that are read on palms, in its own 'eternal lines'. It makes the leap in a single word, using means much favoured in poetry: cunning and punning.

At the same time, if the question, Who is being addressed? is beside the point, this is not because the whole poem is without reference. I am not offering an introversive reading like those perpetrated in the Paris of the sixties, and still popular. I see no reason to treat the poem as a kind of autistic child. 'Thou' is out there, beyond the text, in our experience of winds, and of beauty,

and of the fear of death. And nature is not dismissed: it returns. It returns, even, in the first allusion to artifice: 'When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st'. To 'grow' is a verb from nature, and time is where 'nature's changing course' occurs. In this verse from which, incidentally, Proust might have written the last page of *A la recherche du temps perdu*, the eternity available to 'thee' lengthens through the time of men and passes, to quote again from Yeats's 'Sailing to Byzantium', through the 'dying generations'. Nature returns also in the fact that the 'life' of the poem is similarly situated in, and dependent on, that human continuity: 'So long as men can breathe and eyes can see'. Indeed, there is nothing here merely emblematic, nothing of the 'pen' or the 'book'. It is the physicality of readers of poetry which is stressed: they 'breathe' and have 'eyes'; and while they presumably appreciate the beauty of 'thee' in their minds, it is their bodies we are told about. An imaginative eternity is grounded in human physique. Shakespeare even emphasises the bodily nature of reading beyond what is necessary, since, whereas we might take for granted that we need eyes to see the page, he insists that we also need breath to articulate the poem through our bodies. And among those readers of the poem we are brought to confront ourselves; we ourselves, at the moment we meet those lines, are the ones breathing and seeing. The reader is not addressed in the poem, but he is made present, and even more surprisingly, he is involved in the work of comparison. For another reason behind the choice specifically of breath and eyes is that they relate to the sun as the 'eye' of heaven and to the winds. We too are drawn into the poem's world of correspondences, though our presence is not entirely comfortable. The eye of heaven is referred to as shining 'too hot', and the winds as roughly shaking the buds of May. We are associated with that destructive side of nature from which an 'eternal summer' has to be won.

Nevertheless, we can represent Shakespeare as saying that his young person was made so as to end in a beautiful poem, and this could give us pause. I am adapting a famous *boutade* of Mallarmé's (in 'Sur l'évolution littéraire'), a 'shocking' statement that he let drop in the ear of a journalist but which he meant, with his own interpretation, very seriously, to the effect that the world itself was made so as to end in a beautiful book. This could be the nadir of 'art for art's sake': not only would the work of art have no meaning, no vulgar point – no need of meaning or point – outside of its own self-justifying aesthetic isolation: it would be the end and

justification for the whole of life, the Moloch to which our childish thoughts of goodness, and compassion, and enquiry, are to be sacrificed. I have tried to make the view unattractive, but it is not entirely unknown in post-romantic writing. Or it could imply – and this I think is where Mallarmé stands – that the random thereness of the world enters intelligibility by entering an order of words. The word is necessary to the world; it is, in that sense, the world's end. But one might also say that the word is good for the world only insofar as it is not the end, but a stage on the way back to the world. Or: a poem is necessary provided one passes through it. One of the depths of Sonnet 18 is that while its ending celebrates poetry, even to the point of celebrating 'this' very poem, it simultaneously returns one to the everyday world of breath and of sight, and to the here-ness of one's own body. The work of comparison, the poem-work, is for now.

But the reverse is true as well: as we return to here and now we are also drawn into the poem. We move between world and word in a perfect miming of what occurs throughout our experience, since the life of a race having a language is a shuttling which does not finish. The Judaeo–Christian tradition holds that the Word was in the beginning, and that the world proceeded from it. Eden would be a place with unlikeness but without disjunctive difference. That difference enters with the Fall, to sever words from things, statements from truth, the desired from the actual; to separate heaven from earth. With difference comes exclusion, nostalgia, elegy, and parody, and longing. And also work, for do not difference and work go hand in hand? In that loss of origin, Adam's punishment was the obligation to counter by his labour the new and awful difference which had opened between himself and the earth. 'Cursed is the ground for thy sake', he is told; 'thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee . . . In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread' (Genesis 3: 17–19). It is a terrible prediction, not only of tilling but of the whole practice of life, and of the practice of poetry. Here too the difference is accompanied by likeness, though in the context it can only be menacing, since the passage continues: '. . . till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return'. The familiar words point to a definitive overcoming of difference which one would willingly forgo.

Poetry belongs to our work, as a result and a sign, like everything else, of our fallen condition. Specifically, it works our relation with

the earth and, one might want to add, with the Lord of the earth. Its words work to make the world a habitation 'meet for us', and to make us meet inhabitants. A poem is a plying between, a comparing, a conferring. It plies between ourselves and what is not ourselves, between each and every item of our experience, between each and every thing out there; and it also plies between itself and the world. One can say, with particular point in English, that work is between word and world. And since there is a plying and a between, the likeness is forever accompanied by difference. Indeed, it is poetry which, in uttering our desire to be in the world (to be, in the world), reveals our distance. It can give us, finally, neither the earth nor a plenary word. There is, unfortunately, a world of difference between the world of work and the poem, the work of art. Or: between the world of work and the work of art there is – a world of difference.

* * *

It is here that Heidegger has something important to say. Heidegger was, of course, a philosopher, but he is very good on poetry, perhaps because he read and meditated on poets – on Hölderlin, C. F. Meyer, Rilke and others – rather than reading theorists. It is important to remember, through the current din, that there is a conversation going on, that poets speak to poets, through the ties of friendship, or hostility, and across the ages, and that *here* is where poems are written, problems are raised and maybe solved, and new ways of thinking about poetry, and of thinking poetry, are discovered. It ought to be obvious: poets are the professors of poetry, but it is difficult nowadays to hold that steadily in view. Viewing it steadily, and commenting on some lines of Trakl, Heidegger is able to say this, in a lecture of 1950: 'What is this naming? Does it merely deck out the imaginable familiar objects and events – snow, bell, window, falling, ringing – with words of a language? No. This naming does not hand out titles, it does not apply terms, but it calls into the word'.[2] My immediate thought is that he could have been referring to Adam's naming of the animals, and that what he says throws light on that naming, since, as I understand it, the Hebrew word which describes Adam's 'calling', and which, prior to that, describes God Himself 'calling' the light Day, and the darkness Night, the firmament Heaven, the dry land Earth and the gathering together of the waters Seas, has also our

sense of 'calling to'. To name is to call is to call to: it is vocative, it addresses the other, it seeks relation. And it is still the case, at least in poetry. Perhaps, indeed, that is another reason why we need poetry, because, among all our ways of naming, poetry at least does not merely hand out titles. (Perhaps, too, I was wrong to suggest that nothing as prodigious as the Big Bang summons the imagination of poetry, if one considers that divine Naming which travels the worlds, as the remote origin of the poet's naming.) Poetry 'calls', and, says Heidegger, it calls 'into the word'. This is something more than calling into the poem: for the word is larger than the poem, and poetry is seen – to put it more crudely than Heidegger does – as facing the problem of reference, as speaking across the gap between language and things. Not that poetry reduces the gap to nothing. For he also says: 'The call does indeed call. Thus it brings the presence of what was previously uncalled into a nearness. But the call, in calling it here, has already called out to what it calls. Where to? Into the distance in which what is called remains, still absent'. This play of presence and absence could have been viewed tragically, as an irremediable failure to reach the remote otherness of what we know to be there. But in Heidegger's persuasive words one sees a certain joy in letting be, in allowing the otherness, in being content with the calling, which does enable one to hear the world 'in the word', and which creates great spaces around one. There can be an egotistical motive for wanting to attain the reality of the other (as one assumes that Adam could), to reach through, or around, the word 'tree' to the tree itself: a motive which has to do with interference, possessiveness, power. In Heidegger's understanding there is no mere will, and the centre is not oneself but the 'place of arrival which is also called in the calling' (199). It is a calm, unselfish view. Poetry sounds across the distance.

Heidegger speaks later (202), in a slightly different context, of an 'intimacy' which is nevertheless not a 'sameness'. If we turn back to our concern for 'like', we remember that Adam calls to his likeness, and calls her into the word 'Eve', and that the first humans are intimate without being the same. They are the beginning of the deepest human relationship, for which 'a man . . . shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh'. A word is surfacing here. The extreme form of 'like' is 'love'. As a piece of wordplay it seems too good to be true.

If we now return to Sonnet 18, we can say that Shakespeare calls

'thee' into the word. We do not know, I repeat, who this he or she is: not only does Shakespeare not merely hand out a title, he withholds one. The world is called into the word as a 'thou', and there is a perfect disposition of likeness, of distance, of space. But the poem also insists on calling the word back into the world, and one can imagine here two undesirables. Calling into the word could be a displacing of the real, or of any notion of the real, into the autocracy of illusion. It could be a mere flight of fancy or, worse, an unballasted voyaging of the imagination, of the kind we associate with Romanticism but which the Romantics also understood profoundly, and about which they told the best cautionary tales. The move back into the world could be, on the contrary, anti-climactic, a mere let-down. It is one of the Romantics, in fact, one of the poets of that other great rhetorical moment, who resolves the question and transforms it.

In a famous essay on Théophile Gautier, Baudelaire places a phrase which does not seem to have become famous at all, yet which in itself sways perfectly, with neither sublimity nor bathos, between the world and the word. Baudelaire is saying something quite ordinary about Gautier, and the fact that his 'poetic' short stories, through their very ability to rise above the trivial into the rare, the exotic, the supernatural, risk losing a great deal on the side of reality, but he continues by saying, after that comma, that they might lose, or could have lost, 'the magic of verisimilitude'. 'Verisimilitude', or probability, is a word much in favour with neoclassical writers, since it derives from the moment in chapter 9 of the *Poetics* when Aristotle says of the poet that he describes, not what has happened but the kind of thing which might happen, through being probable, or necessary. (This ability to move into the hypothetical and the universal is what gives the poet the edge over the historian.) As we might put it now, the fiction of poetry deals not with fact but with something 'like' fact; or, the truth of poetry is its plying, as one can say in French, between *le vrai* and *le vraisemblable*, or as one can say in English, between the true and a true seeming. Had Baudelaire simply said that in going for poetic elevation one might have to sacrifice verisimilitude, his point would have been clear but forgettable; what is unforgettable, once one has focused on it, is the alliance of 'verisimilitude' with 'magic'. For 'la magie de la vraisemblance' emerges from another area of the essay, and recalls, quite deliberately, an earlier phrase, which *has* become famous. There, Baudelaire is praising Gautier for his

understanding of 'correspondence', symbolism, metaphor, his ability to define the mystery of objects as one regards them, and he continues: 'To handle a language skilfully, is to practise a kind of evocative sorcery'. The sentence is even more thoroughly magic in the original, since *évocatoire* also implies the calling forth of spirits, and behind 'skilfully' in *savamment* there is a hint of 'cunningly', of proceeding with secret knowledge. The sorcery of the poet is to raise a world, to cause, for instance, 'colour' to 'speak'. It is the power he has, or that his language has, of transforming the world. Yet when Baudelaire returns to his metaphor, it is to describe, not the process by which reality is changed but, on the contrary, the means by which a changed reality relates back to the world of every day. To the 'evocative sorcery' corresponds, not a humdrum probable but the *magic* of verisimilitude, so that the recognition of fact becomes, in poetry, as magical as the discovery of fiction.

The phrase binds the two movements, away from the world into the word and back from the word into the world, in a single, and singular, and quasi antiphrastic process of 'magic': into, indeed – to use another translation of *vraisemblance* and to return to the main focus of this chapter – the magic of the 'likely'. And Baudelaire keeps up the surprise. There is such a danger, he says, and yet Gautier avoids it, and at certain moments in *Le Roman de la Momie* the 'imagination' of the reader is 'transported', not, as one is expecting him to say, into another world, but *dans le vrai*, into the true. This 'true' is, to be sure, a 'second reality', which is created – and here he returns directly to his earlier metaphor – by the 'sorcery' of the Muse. But we cannot take this to be a poetic world apart from, over against, the customary world. In the context, what the sorcery of poetry leads to is a second reality which contains reality, a word which includes the world, a word where the world is changed into itself.

By conjuring the neoclassical terms 'truth' and 'verisimilitude' with the romantic term 'imagination', Baudelaire, in a few sentences, celebrates both the work of poetry and the claims of the real, and does so in the best way possible, by astonishing. While we are thinking of French poetry, I should like to remember in passing a statement of Paul Eluard's which similarly moves in one direction only to turn breathtakingly in another: 'The magic of poetry is to call things by their name'. And while we are thinking of 'like' as entering the process of the world's change, we might take two

final glances at the Bible, as an instruction in rhetoric. For if it locates 'like' in the beginning, at the creation, it also locates it in the end, at the re-creation. What is 'the kingdom of heaven'? Time and again in Matthew's gospel Jesus says what it is, while apparently avoiding doing so: it is 'like to a grain of mustard seed' (13: 31), 'like unto treasure hid in a field' (13: 44), 'like unto a man that is an householder' (20: 1), 'like unto a certain king' (22: 2), and so forth. In each case the kingdom is like a story, for the noun in the comparison always articulates into a verb, usually in the past tense of narrative: 'The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid . . .' (13: 33). Indeed, it is like story, and were we concerned here with narrative there would be much to explore. But what is the common feature of all these parables of the kingdom, which is also 'like unto a man which sowed good seed' (13: 24), 'like unto a merchant man' (13: 45), 'like unto a net' (13: 47)? Of course, the definition is clear: the kingdom of heaven is 'like'.

And what of an even more extraordinary statement, this time about Jesus, in the first epistle of John? We do not know what we shall be like after the resurrection, John says to his readers, but we know that when Jesus appears 'we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is' (3: 2). 'We shall be like him': it is the restoration of the 'like' of origin, of the 'likeness' to God of the original man and woman. And the logic which asserts that we shall be like him *because* we shall see him plainly seems to imply that the more we are 'like', the more we can see, and the better we see, the better we change.

* * *

I shall press no further into this theo-rhetoric, mainly because I am not at all sure of understanding, though I will state the obvious, which is that one cannot reverse the earlier expression and say that 'like' is the kingdom of heaven, in the way that certain theologians reverse 'God is love' and come up with 'Love is God'. By its work of comparison poetry cannot set aside grace and by itself enable one to enter the 'new heavens' and the 'new earth'. 'Like' is only, to be precise, like the kingdom of heaven. And this brings us round again to the question of death. The 'magic' of poetry can do a great deal, but the most evident thing that it cannot do is overcome death. Nor, to be sure, can chemistry, or stock-

broking, or a career at the bar. But for poetry, as for all the arts, the fact is relevant. Death enters its innermost concerns. Poetry contends with death, as part of its struggle for origin, which is where we began; it also knows the failure of origin, and that death is the end of that failure. The loss of origin means the loss of life. Poetry calls into the word, but one must not be over-persuaded, since the word into which it calls is not the Word. This is the limit of poetry, blindingly obvious, and the kind of poem where the limit is most clear is the one which pretends otherwise.

In Sonnet 18 Shakespeare writes of bestowing 'eternal lines' on 'thee' and thereby giving 'life', yet the poem is about death. To suggest a power of immortality is to draw attention to mortality, and the poem is full of violence, of too much, of brevity, of decline, of loss. Nature here is the realm of beauty and of death, of those two contraries which appear together so often in poetry, and when the resolving, resolute sestet claims to surpass it, we know that Shakespeare's seriousness is to be not quite serious. The poet doth protest too much, and like the Player Queen in *Hamlet* he knows what he is about. For one might read the poem as provocatively undoing itself. It opens as if a rhetorical reflection were already under way: since I am going to compare, since I am entering rhetoric's domain of possibility, to what shall I compare thee? Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? It then disables the means by which we overrule comparison – the *more* and the *less* by which the thing compared seems to escape the thing to which it is compared – so as to show that everything is comparable in the face of death. The poem, moreover, is not presented alone, and nothing can prevent us remembering Sonnet 16, and its knowledge that rhyme is, after all, 'barren'.

Shakespeare does not name 'thee' in the same world in which Adam named his likeness, the Woman. In addressing the thouness of the world, he cannot make it secure in the word. The difference is death. So one returns yet again to that first line. What exactly is it asking? While it says, I shall compare, and compare, and this will create a world for living, is it not also asking what, really, can a poem achieve, when Death *will* brag, and when, to remember another earlier sonnet, the twelfth, 'thou among the wastes of time must go'? The meaning of the question is, at its deepest, that it is a question.

The poem does not save the world as 'thou' by calling into the word. It draws the reader too into its awareness, into the endlessly

repeatable present moment of its being read, here and now, by men and women living their mortality in their senses. And most subtly of all, it involves Shakespeare. I am thinking of the 'I', that thinnest of pronouns yet also the most erect. It enters the poem at the beginning, and I wonder if our sense of the ease of the opening lines owes something to the fact that the first line moves as it were naturally from the first person ('I') to the second ('thee') to the third ('a summer's day'), and that the first three lines advance through verbs in the first person ('Shall I compare'), the second person ('Thou art') and the third ('Rough winds do shake'). The rest of the octave remains in the third person; the whole of the sestet is likewise in the third, but with the particularity of being addressed to the second ('But thy eternal summer shall not fade . . .') As a means of persuading the reader it is effective in its almost invisible simplicity. The 'I' does not reappear; it is present only so as to refer to the interplay of 'thou' and the world of 'thou', and one might agree that this is how it should be. This 'I' is in no simple sense Shakespeare. Although one can exaggerate the distance between the poet and the 'I' in the Renaissance, and void that distance of any meaning, nevertheless in this work in particular, with its overt concern for writing and reading, one can say that the 'I' of the poem is the 'I' of poetry. It is the source of the poem, of the comparing. But then it too is subject to the aporia of comparison, the reduction to death. I said that the 'I' does not reappear, and there is no mention at the close, as one could imagine there having been, of, say, 'my' lines; but the poet does return, of course, at the close, and in some glory. The repeated 'this' in the last line ('So long lives this, and this gives life to thee'), offers itself after all as a poem conferring nothing less than immortality. But what does 'this' mean? It means that the 'I' is dead. 'I' has been replaced by 'this'. The energy of the line divides: against the jubilation of 'this . . . this', and against the eloquence of repetition, chiasmus, alliteration, goes the disappearance of the 'I'. Or, to put it the other way round: 'this' means both that Shakespeare is dead and that something called 'Shakespeare' is still alive. The reader is lifted by the thought that Shakespeare was right, that his poem has survived and that, here we are, still reading about 'thee'; but at the same time Shakespeare has vanished into his name. Malherbe, in an impressively arrogant poem ('Au Roi') praising the French king Louis XIII and himself, will perfectly capture this sense that the immortalising poet becomes, as we

might say now, reified, by referring to himself, again in the final line of a sonnet, in the third person: 'Ce que Malherbe écrit dure éternellement', 'What Malherbe writes lasts eternally'. So when we return once again to the first line, we become aware, among all its subtleties, of yet one thing more: the fragility, the uncertainty, of the 'I'. It is carefully, but not perfectly, hidden away, in that opening question which is also an initial questioning: 'Shall *I* compare . . . ?'

* * *

That is clearly not the place to close. To think creatively about poetry does require, I believe, that one enter into the distress of writing, into everything that scrutinises poetry in its larger ambitions, but also that one emerge from those three days, as it were, in the belly of the whale. One encounters the limit of poetry: it cannot give us origin, since we cannot speak in that Eden which I suppose everyone recognises as an anagram of 'need'; and as it works in the other and better direction, towards the future, it cannot rid that future of death. Poetry takes us to the ends: it shows us origin and death and it brings them into our experience, as the edges beyond which we cannot go by means of poetry but of which, without poetry, we should be in danger of being ignorant. It makes us aware in particular of the Word – that is, of the absent Word to which even poetry cannot attain. It never finally succeeds. Of making many poems there is no end.

To emerge, on the other hand, is partly to grasp the importance of eloquence, and of the need to close with its creative and heuristic 'magic'. It is to reflect, as we have been reflecting, on such matters as likeness, and calling. To go further, within the rhetorical tradition, would involve considering any number of hints and guesses, including Cicero's naming of what we call figures of speech as 'formae et lumina orationis'.[3] No doubt this has to be translated 'the forms and ornaments of speech' or of discourse, since *lumina* can be used of, say, eminent men who are the ornaments, the luminaries, of the republic. Yet other meanings tug at the phrase. *Lumina* also means the outlook or prospect of a building, and figures, like other words or groupings of words, may be a succession of prospects which language gives us on to the world. They may also be the 'looks', the 'glances' of language. Supremely, and most simply, are they not the 'lights' of speech?

Language reaches for the light, like a tree; and fitfully – not in all figures and not only in figures – it seems to find it. Light is then shed on the world, and spreads in the discourse.

Another of those hints, if one dips again into the classical word-hoard, is Quintilian's recalling a definition of rhetoric as 'bene dicendi scientia' (*Institutes of Oratory*, 2.15.34). The simple words open large spaces for thought. Why should we concern ourselves with speaking *well*, and what are the depths of that 'well'? There is a promise in this *bene* which such purposes as persuading judges, senate or multitude, or moving audience or reader, do not fulfil. If one truly understood it, one would maybe understand all one needed to know. One would be making new sense of that quite inordinate claim, made with great seriousness in the rhetorical tradition, that of all our disciplines eloquence is the most important. It is one of the things I shall be thinking about throughout this book, but I suppose a whole lifetime would hardly do it justice.

3

Dream

So as to induce Raphael to converse with him longer, Adam undertakes to recount, in Book VIII of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the story of his own beginning. He realises immediately that this is the story which can hardly be told:

> For man to tell how human life began
> Is hard; for who himself beginning knew?
> (ll. 250–1)

Even Adam-in-the-beginning can only go so far back, and his first memory is of ignorance. On 'finding' himself, he says (line 254), he looked round at the world and then at his body,

> But who I was, or where, or from what cause,
> Knew not.
> (ll. 270–1)

He could, however, speak, without any hindrance:

> to speak I tried, and forthwith spake,
> My tongue obeyed and readily could name
> (ll. 271–2)

and in response to his questions he is eventually told all he needs to know. He is, after all, in the unfallen world.

The world travels a long way, and we reach the third volume of Beckett's trilogy. Finding himself, perhaps on the page, someone else says:

> Where now? Who now? When now?

He is definitively excluded from origin:

> I shall not be alone, in the beginning.

Speech is quite unavailing:

> I seem to speak . . . I shall have to speak of things of which I cannot speak . . .

For whereas Adam names and is named (line 296), Beckett's 'I', or his world, or both, are *The Unnameable.* He is an 'I' who appears to have been reading Milton, and to have measured the distance, which is our distance, from the unfallen first Man.

Beckett looks into the darkness of origin, and self, and language, in the world we know, or thought we knew. Milton maybe allows a pale hint of that darkness into his description of Paradise, but is more concerned to explore how we should experience if Paradise were still with us. For Adam continues by relating two apocryphal dreams. In the first (from line 287) he seems to be led by a divine being, 'over fields and waters, as in air/Smooth sliding without step', to 'the garden of bliss'. In the second (from line 452), he sees the same divine being fashion one of his ribs into a woman 'lovely fair'. In each case he finds on awaking that he has not merely dreamed: he has dreamed reality. Eden is all about him, the woman is before him. Referring in particular to the first of these dreams, Keats says of the imagination, in a famous phrase, that it 'may be compared to Adam's dream – he awoke and found it truth.'[4]

Did Keats make this comparison because he sensed that Milton himself, while describing dream, was thinking of poetry? In both cases, once Adam has been seized by a 'soft oppression' or 'overpowered' by a heavenly nature as if by inspiration, it is his 'fancy' that enables him to continue. In the first dream, his mind fills with natural sights but, rising above them by the force of vision, he seeks a nature beyond nature, and finds it in Eden. What he finds makes all that he has known before seem 'scarce pleasant'; yet Eden is still the earth. According to this first dream, poetry would be a search for the earth, but for an earth renewed, perfected.

It is of interest that Milton invented the dream. Genesis merely states (2: 8, 15) that God took the man and placed him in the garden. Milton also invented the second dream, for while God does cause a 'deep sleep' to fall upon Adam so as to operate on him (2: 21), the sleep is dreamless. Is there dreaming in Paradise? The question is pertinent in many fields; it is highly relevant to poetry; the Bible seems to answer in the negative, if only by

omission. Yet Milton, taking advantage of the *ekstasis* by which that deep sleep is translated in the Septuagint, and which he himself translates as 'trance', fills the sleep of the first man with a dream even more brimming with meaning. For Adam dreams that something is created from his substance, that a part of his being situated near the heart (the detail is Milton's) is externalised so as to form an entirely new object. While this occurs within him, moreover, it is the work of a divine power; he himself remains passive, though with considerable alertness and concentration. It is the dream of poetry, or of art; of the creating of something strongly desired through the intervention of a power which is greater than one's own. Even the suffering that may be involved in creation is present in the dream: Adam's life-blood streams from a wide wound. Because this is before the Fall, however, the wound is immediately healed.

A poet might note here that the new reality responds to a desire which Adam has been able to express up to a point, as the desire for a 'like' (line 418), but which he had no means of imagining fully until the completion of the dream, or the poem. He might also note, no doubt with a mixture of emotions, that in Eden, were there ever such a place, the correspondence between the wish and the work is perfect. He would note above all that the object produced by the dream is a woman, and that she is Woman in all her excellence. One sees the poet in Milton, following the facts of Genesis yet projecting Eve as the ideal, the absolute, poem. Like the garden, she makes everything which is not herself appear 'mean', but all the beauty of the world is rather 'summed up', 'contained' in her. All things are inspired, through her, with 'love' and 'delight'. Wallace Stevens claimed that a poet looks at the world as a man looks at a woman, and might have added that a poet looks at a woman as a man looks at the world. The object of the dream of poetry is an Edenic earth, or a woman who is the earth, and one sees in this dream of the Adam, of man before the Fall, that the woman who focuses the poet's desire for the earth and its heaven is not, like Laura or Beatrice, shadowed with death.

Not that Adam's dream is without a glimpse of our world. At the last moment he sees the woman disappear and leave him 'dark'; on awaking he seems already to know, if only momentarily, the pain of the future, fallen, world, since he prepares either to find her 'or for ever to deplore / Her loss . . .' The dream tells him, in fact, a further truth (in conformity with a traditional belief in

the reliability of dreams that occur just before waking), since after the Fall the woman will, in a way, be lost to him, and he will deplore for ever.

In the two dreams which he devises for Adam Milton projects, in masterly images, the work of dream, of the imagination, in its ideal condition. Knowing that paradise is lost, he describes the practice of poetry as we should like it to be. But since paradise is lost, all this is merely, as it were, Milton's dream. The reality envisaged by a poet is far from being Edenic. It is even defined by the fact that it is not the original garden, since Eden, to which we constantly recur whatever our belief, is surely the sign of our distress at the ability we have, in a world we know to be imperfect, to imagine a world that is faultless. The poet cannot 'dream' like Adam, successfully, any more than he can name like him. If we need to think about the relations between poetic dream and reality, this is because those relations are not given, and because the very notion of 'reality' is disturbed.

I realise that to talk about Eden and the Fall, to add, in the same Christian perspective, that the world envisaged by poetry is subject to 'corruption' and 'vanity', is to move, for many, among words which are merely vacuous. Yet the world which the poet faces is inhabited, beyond any polemics, by death. A poet describes, celebrates, denigrates, flees, espouses, a being that dies. And death is surely the beginning of poetry, though not its end; any poetics which ignores this must condemn itself to triviality. A poet can also find, like anyone else, that the world might have been different, that nothing determines it in being what it is. It lacks necessity, and the 'death of God', the loss of the source of necessity, has plunged our century in particular into a contingence which, for many, prevents reality from being real. Faith in God can alter, and explain, this contingence, but does not efface it, nor the sadness it provokes. The presence of an absent God, the mortality, however provisional, of creation, the curse on the earth, leave the objects of the world still evading us, because they are other, but also because they seem to be alien from themselves. Or are they no longer themselves, not yet themselves? We strain to understand; each of us looks through different eyes; our difficulty is that we do not have an Adamic intelligence. Before the simplest object, one hesitates. One perceives a lack, one knows that one is not filled, and one searches about for the reason. I try to understand for myself, but myself is part of what I don't understand; and I

don't know if others have the same experience. Things do not appear to be as they should be; they are not, somehow, right.

It is not a question of dogma, of an *a priori* decision as to what the world is like. Death stands in the way, and we all seem to engage in the world with something like fear and trembling, as also with joy. Nor is it a question of defects of which the observer is free. Reality includes the poet, not as a 'secret change' (the 'secret changement' of Valéry's 'Cimetière marin') but rather as a résumé of corruption, a microcosm of vanity. Corruption and vanity, if you will allow the terms, surround us and pass through us; or as Pascal has it, 'rien n'est simple de ce qui s'offre à l'âme, et l'âme ne s'offre jamais simple à aucun sujet'; nothing of what presents itself to the soul is simple, and the soul never presents itself simple to any subject.[5]

This lack of simplicity, this duality, may dissuade us from transcribing the real so as to represent it 'as it is'. We are disconcerted from the beginning, and the initial response of the poet, to the world as to himself, might well resemble those traditional emotions of the tragic spectator, pity and fear, along with the 'admiration', the wonder, which Seneca and then the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries added to them. Wonder maybe impels one to write: because of pity and fear, or suchlike emotions, one cannot simply write.

* * *

In this situation one might wish to recreate the conditions of a beginning, whether believed in or merely fervently desired: an Eden of the real, of perception, of poetry. Is this not the aim of the opening lines of Wordsworth's *Prelude*? He is concerned above all to create a presence. From the first line: 'Oh there is blessing in this gentle breeze' (I quote from the text of 1805), nature is happily present, and so is inspiration, in the form of an English wind. The wind is a kind of dream, which comes to him as a 'messenger', 'half conscious' of the joy it brings (lines 4–5), and creativity begins, as for Adam, with '*Trances* of thought and mountings of the mind' (20). There is also the presence of the sacred, in the almost angelic breeze and in the fact that, while his 'cheek' is refreshed by it (3), his soul receives a blessing. Most profoundly, there is the presence of the beginning according to the Bible, partly through the well-known modification of a line in Milton. In the final lines of *Paradise*

Lost Milton says of Adam and Eve: 'The world was all before them'. Returning to the Lake District Wordsworth cries: 'The earth is all before me' (15). Not only does he substitute the earth for the world, which is itself significant, but he changes the tense of the verb so as to situate himself not in the past and in a poem but in the present. He identifies *hic et nunc* with the first man, and he takes this identification even further back, to before the expulsion from Eden. For of all the quotations which abound in these opening lines (which remain, nevertheless, miraculously free of pedantry and, in their effect, spontaneous), the most ambitious is also the most discreet. The words, 'I breathe again' (19), while expressing the usual feeling of relief at finding oneself in the country, are also an allusion to the moment in Genesis (2: 7) when God breathes into Adam's nostrils the breath of life. The Adam of before the Fall is actualised in Wordsworth, and the poet finds himself not in one beginning among many but in the Beginning itself.

He even creates a presence for himself at the beginning of English poetry. The 'blessing' of his 'gentle breeze' recalls the 'sweete breeth' of Zephirus in the opening of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, which is likewise an inspiration at the outset of a long poem. Here too, Wordsworth goes back to origin.

In this 'glad preamble' (VII 4), Wordsworth discovers a pristine world after clearing himself from a fallen world. He has been 'set free' from 'a house / Of bondage' (6–7); he recovers inspiration after the breaking up of 'a long-continued frost' (49); and he breathes 'again'. The earth, now, is Eden; 'I' am Adam; poetry can occur.

He sustains over many lines this vision at once Edenic and actual, but the promises of the breeze are impossible to realise; they open for him another perspective on to what Eliot will call the 'cruelty' of writing. Everything changes at line 55, when he addresses Coleridge. The word 'Thus' throws into the past everything that we have been reading. It seizes that series of confidences, as to the thoughts and sensations which Wordsworth experiences moment by moment, to make of them a poem. 'Thus far, O friend, did I . . . Pour out that day my soul in measured strains'. The effect is startling (to be compared to the effect of 'Thus' in Hardy's 'The Voice'), for like the poet, the reader is suddenly thrust out of the present and of presence and contemplates behind him a piece of writing. Like the poet, he is expelled from Eden.

Wordsworth continues his narrative: 'I paced on' (69), but with

the tense, precisely, of narrative. He states, over and again, that he is incapable of continuing his poem. One passes, with a certain vertigo, from the dream of an Adamic and inspired poet to the reality of a man baulked of his desire. If it is true that the poet is the man or woman who does not know how to write, this embarrassment of Wordsworth, at the very beginning of a long poem which will eventually become a kind of epic, is both persuasive and moving. He becomes tongue-tied, 'harmony' disperses (106), and he is left in the worst of states, with 'lastly utter silence' (107). He has to renounce the dream of an immediate Eden, with neither sweat nor tears. For more than two hundred lines he questions his talent and searches vainly for a subject, asking himself 'Was it for this . . . ?' (271) that nature prepared him, when she seemed to have nurtured him from childhood for some great poetic task. (This is another example of Wordsworth's constant *naturalising*, in this case his transfer to nature of Dante's preparation by grace.) The reader expects him to return to the opening and to resolve his problem, but once he is launched into this other narrative, of his childhood, he continues, and by prolonging it he makes of it the matter of his poem. He will write the poem by recounting in some detail the circumstances of his life which have brought him to this critical moment in which he discovers his inability to write, and in so doing he will discover his vocation. One thinks of Proust – or rather, one thinks that Proust must have thought of Wordsworth – and one realises that Wordsworth too, in renouncing the writing of the present, has drawn his book from memory. One realises also that he learns from the beginning what Proust's Marcel states towards the end, in *Time Regained*, that 'true paradises are the paradises one has lost', and that he finds, or pretends to find, the possibility of writing his poem in this initial renunciation.

I say 'pretends' since the impossible Edenic dream was a separate and presumably fragmentary passage, only added to *The Prelude* in early 1804. 'Was it for this . . . ?' opens the two-part *Prelude* of 1799, and at the time it represented Wordsworth's distress at his inability to make progress with *The Recluse*, the ambitious philosophical poem which he had planned with Coleridge. The addition of the 'glad preamble' and of its undoing to the extended five-part *Prelude*, and their retention in the versions of 1805 and 1850, redirects this creative distress towards the *Prelude* itself. Wordsworth creates – artificially and yet, at a deeper level, with a

due sense of the truth of writing – a beginning which fails.

Wordsworth has renewed, after Milton, the image of an ideal project for poetry, of a paradise perceived in a fallen world, which the poet must renounce and then reach for in the conditions imposed on Adam, that is by labour.[6] A poem must be elaborated. So *The Prelude* will move between *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*; it announces already the theme of Proust's novel. To the latter's formula, one might add that the paradises one has lost are not necessarily paradises one has known. Doesn't one discover Eden at the moment one discovers its loss? This is clear when paradise is defined as childhood. An 'angel infancy' is not something one loses at the moment of adolescence, but an invention of the adult, a creative misremembering, the dream of a state of being where, with neither the responsibility nor the guilt attaching to adulthood, one can enter into immediate communion with a world. The simultaneous encounter of paradise and of loss is a lesson, offered by the process of time in an individual life, about the nature of reality and of desire. The poet is one in whom desire is strong, and who agrees unwillingly to write in exile and to see the gate of the garden closed, and a flaming sword turning every way to exclude him from his country. And yet, to adapt a phrase from Mallarmé's 'Crise de vers', 'sachons *n'existerait pas le vers*', let us be clear that otherwise verse would not exist. There are poets *because* we have been expelled from paradise – there is no writing in Eden – and the sorrow of the poet is also his joy and his reason for being. If the poetic line for Mallarmé 'recompenses the defect of languages', poetry, one might say, recompenses the defect of the real, by constituting itself, however fragile and provisional it may be, as a 'superior complement', and by opening towards the world's possibility.

If I insist, somewhat, on the religious aspect of dream and reality and their relation in poetry, it is because of two convictions. Religious vocabulary, and Christian vocabulary in particular, seems to me uniquely adequate to describe what is essential in poetry, as in language. However one may interpret them for oneself, the ideas of paradise, fall, renunciation, death, resurrection, re-creation, give access to the most intimate moves of the poet and of the poem. When Pascal notes, in a fragment (265) which has been taken up in contemporary poetics, that a figure, like a portrait, includes absence and presence, pleasure and displeasure, he recognises, or allows one to recognise, that to be able to represent the real one

must consent to its displacement. When, in *Time Regained*, Marcel announces 'the unavoidable law which says that one can only imagine what is absent', he is stating in his own way that to be able to imagine the world – that is, in part, to conceive it with a view to poetry or to narrative – one must first lose it. That may sound, and it may be, modern, and yet one might again return to the seventeenth century, and listen carefully to Dryden's definition of the 'proper wit' of a heroic or historical poem, in his 'account' of *Annus Mirabilis*. It consists, he writes, of 'some lively and apt description, dressed in such colours of speech that it sets before your eyes the absent object as perfectly and more delightfully than nature'. 'More delightfully' is the expression to hear. Language well used presents the absent object to the eyes of the imagination not diminished, as in Hobbes, but augmented. It renews sense, goes beyond nature, and enables one to see better – to see 'delightfully'. It enables one to enter the domain of rhetoric, not at the eminently serious levels of 'teaching' and 'moving' but at the apparently more trivial level of 'delighting'. Unless the seed die, it does not become wheat; unless the real dies, it does not become dream. Unless the world dies, it does not become poem.

The second conviction is simply that poetry always has a religious dimension, without which it perishes, and that the act of writing enables one to penetrate, however shallowly, the mystery of the real, of language, and perhaps even of the word, as it also introduces one to that dialectic of renouncing and receiving which is at the heart of the human adventure.

* * *

The route between losing and regaining may also pass through bad dream, or nightmare. The nightmare of Gérard de Nerval's *Aurélia*, to take an obvious example from French literature, is remarkable in that it reverses the two dreams of Milton's Adam. Here is the ending of section VI:

> La dame que je suivais, développant sa taille élancée dans un mouvement qui faisait miroiter les plis de sa robe en taffetas changeant, entoura gracieusement de son bras nu une longue tige de rose trémière, puis elle se mit à grandir sous un clair rayon de lumière, de telle sorte que peu à peu le jardin prenait sa forme, et les parterres et les arbres devenaient les rosaces et

les festons de ses vêtements; tandis que sa figure et ses bras imprimaient leurs contours aux nuages pourprés du ciel. Je la perdais de vue à mesure qu'elle se transfigurait, car elle semblait s'évanouir dans sa propre grandeur. 'Oh! ne fuis pas! m'écriais-je . . . car la nature meurt avec toi!'

Disant ces mots, je marchais péniblement à travers les ronces, comme pour saisir l'ombre agrandie qui m'échappait, mais je me heurtai à un pan de mur dégradé, au pied duquel gisait un buste de femme. En le relevant, j'eus la persuasion que c'était *le sien* . . . Je reconnus des traits chéris, et, portant les yeux autour de moi, je vis que le jardin avait pris l'aspect d'un cimetière. Des voix disaient: 'L'Univers est dans la nuit!'

(The lady whom I was following, extending her slender figure in a movement which set shimmering the folds of her dress in shot silk, passed her bare arm gracefully around a long stem of hollyhock, then began to grow taller in a shaft of clear light, in such a way that the garden gradually assumed her form, and the flower-beds and the trees became the rosettes and festoons of her garments; while her face and her arms impressed their outlines on the crimson clouds of the sky. I was losing sight of her as she was transfigured, for she seemed to disappear into her own greatness. 'Oh, do not leave!' I cried . . . 'for nature dies with you!'

Saying these words, I laboriously pushed my way through brambles, as if to seize the lengthened shadow which eluded me, but I came against a piece of mouldering wall, at the foot of which there lay the bust of a woman. Taking it in my hands, I had the conviction that it was hers . . . I recognised beloved features, and, looking around me, I saw that the garden had taken on the appearance of a cemetery. Voices were saying: 'The Universe is in darkness'.)

The dream centres once more on a loved woman, who represents for Nerval, as Eve for Adam, the world of desire, or the desired world. She gathers into herself the whole of the visible: the earth takes her form, while her outlines are impressed on the sky. She is also the muse. Because she appears, however, in a fallen world, she also unites, like Beatrice and Laura, love and death. Everything lives, and then everything dies, in her, and enters night. In the same way Eden, the paradise which Nerval believed he had seen a few pages previously, is gone, for the garden is suddenly changed into a cemetery. I know of nothing else in literature which describes so vividly, so simply and so convincingly, not the dextrous

transformation of the earth into the 'new earth' of the Christian promise, but its sinister transformation from a perfect garden to a receptacle for the millions of dead of all the generations of men.

In nightmare, the woman dies and Eden disappears. It is true that Nerval will eventually recover Aurélia, mainly through 'charity', but the interest of his tale, in the perspective of this chapter, is that in the meanwhile he explores the ambiguity, the risk, of dream and of imagination. He believes that dream re-establishes universal harmony, in part through rediscovering correspondences: 'Tout vit, tout agit, tout se correspond', everything lives, acts, corresponds. We know this to be a fundamental Romantic dream, the search for a world saved from dispersion. He also believes that dream is the conquest of a life in which one does not die, to be known not in a heaven utterly different from the earth but on the earth itself, once it has been renewed by the imagination: ' "So it is true", I said, overjoyed, "we are immortal and we retain here the images of the world we have inhabited. What happiness to think that all that we have loved will always exist around us!" ' But his troubled conscience also sees the danger of his undertaking.

I am thinking of the first paragraph of the tale (a paragraph which Proust will re-write, I suggest, so as to begin his novel), and of its opening sentence: 'Le Rêve est une seconde vie', dream is a second life. It is an exordium, an *exclamatio* which recalls the rhetorical tradition, and one expects it to be a rejoinder to something else in Pascal, his claim in fragment 44 that the imagination 'has established in man a second nature'. In philosophical discourse the seventeenth century was an era of suspicion about the imagination, reducing it, in Hobbes, to the home of decaying sense and eyeing it, in Pascal, as the malefic rival of the real. Nerval seems to be suggesting, in line with a Romantic redefinition of the imagination as creator of value and even half-creator of the world of perception, that dream constitutes another life superior to life, another real beyond the ordinary real. Yet from the beginning the first moments of sleep are presented as an image of death, and the *I* which, under another form, continues the work of existence, finds itself in a 'vague underground vault'. It is true that death as represented by the imagination can mean the loss of a too delimited *I*, of a fallen world, of a partly illusory life, as of an inadequate language; it can be a passage towards the resurrection of the *I* and of the world, or the descent into hell which permits the ascent to poetry.

It is also true that the story more or less follows this movement. But Nerval's dream is still troubled by an unexplained 'fault' which, though eventually pardoned, leads him into the imagination of apocalypse, where he believes himself to be present at the Flood and at the end of the world.

Where does one go, indeed, led by the imagination? Dream reaches for the earthly paradise; nightmare is invaded by hell on earth. The truth of dream is that it seeks, not to regain the lost Eden but to project in the future something like a new Eden. The truth of nightmare is doubtless that it enters the reality of a fallen world, so as to exacerbate it, or seek out the monster which prowls behind the fine façade, behind the 'excellent order' which we have produced, yet again according to Pascal, from our 'concupiscence' (fragment 106). But what is most disturbing is that dream, imagination – the poem – can become a lure, a danger to life. Certain reactions to what we find it difficult to call external reality disdain it considerably, and remain blind to the support it can provide in our common effort towards whatever salvation we seek. Even Baudelaire, reporting in the 'Salon of 1859' the conversation of Delacroix, takes the lordly view that nature is *only* a dictionary, whereas the most insignificant object may draw the poet, by its simple presence, beyond himself, into another world. There is also a question of guilt, and if a poet feels guilty before a world, an earth, which has need of him, he can feel equally guilty of intervening for his own ends.

It is to be remarked that the Romantics themselves, who invested so much in the imagination, could also fear it. Wordsworth, for example, in the poem 'Processions. Suggested on a Sabbath Morning in the Vale of Chamouny' (whose importance in this connection was noted by Geoffrey Hartman),[7] describes a reaction for which we are hardly prepared:

> Trembling, I look upon the secret springs
> Of that licentious craving in the mind
> To act the God among external things,
> To bind, on apt suggestion, or unbind.

This is already the fear of the boy Rimbaud, at the beginning of *Une saison en enfer*, that the work of the imagination is Satanic, in depriving us of the world; the following lines scathe the classic fables of metamorphosis, which might well transform, as in

Rimbaud's discussion of the 'Alchemy of the Word', a factory into a mosque. And binding according to apt suggestions: isn't this precisely the ambition of Coleridge, of Baudelaire, of Wordsworth himself – to renew the world by the discovery or creation of correspondences? 'Processions' is the moment when Wordsworth, the great affirmer of the imagination and of its authority over the world, takes fright, stands back, and seizing in a kind of unresolved panic the passage in the gospel where Jesus promises to his disciples that whatever they bind or loose on earth shall be bound or loosed in heaven (Matthew 18: 18), sees what the poet does: in aiming to re-write and to re-create the world, he runs the danger of releasing a more disastrous craving, to play God.

One needs to recognise also that poetry is not exempt, by some special grace, from the vanity and corruption of the world. By the rigour of its rhetoric and its prosody, by its perfect deployment in time of words that are, in their way, just, a poem can seem to lay aside the contingence of the real by virtue of its own necessity. Yet the autonomy of the poem, the artifice which may well claim to preserve us from a decaying nature, is both necessary (though the word's meaning has shifted) and arbitrary. You intend to describe a woman: you may say that she has regular features, though she is not beautiful, being too tall and too thick-set, while having irregular features which do not prevent her from being very beautiful, despite her rather small and slender outline. She is a singing teacher, or a model, or a terrorist. If I recall Ionesco, and his farcical decomposing of the matter (in the first scene of *The Bald Primadonna*), it is because all writers tell tales, and for any writer the most warmly felt, the simplest, statement can always slide and perish. A flaming sword bars the way to the word, prevents us from being. Even this, however, seems to turn dialectically for our good. A contingent, mortal, poem in which being does not reside casts us back into the world, which is, after all, the only place to be.

In fact, as one knows, it is not so easy to dissociate the 'real' from the 'imaginary', as if one could exist without the other, now that there are humans. Language itself, which we use continuously and which covers the world in murmurs, inevitably colours and modifies it. The writer above all knows this, since he discovers the imaginary with the very first word. If he speaks of the dying sun, or simply of the setting sun, he finds himself in a figured reality whether he wishes to or not. Even if he is content to name the

sun, without allowing any adjective, any verb, to tangle it into a net of metaphors, he is still not alone with the permanent explosion of hydrogen and helium which governs our lives. A succession of sonorities in the ear, movements of the tongue and of the jaw, an emission of air rising from inside the body, a relation of person to object created by the vocative process of naming, and even a glimpse of the Germanic languages and a reminder of the Saxon invasions, oblige him to intervene in the world and to add to it. The real is to be made *in any case*. However we may mistrust the imagination, we have no choice. Phoebus is not the sun, but the sun as Phoebus, and the poet's real – everyman's real – is to be imagined and forever re-imagined.

As Coleridge argued, in the passage in chapter 13 of *Biographia Literaria* which is quoted everywhere but which still rewards meditation, there is only a difference of degree between the imagination peculiar to the poet and the imagination or perception of the man in the street, of which it is an 'echo'. Imagination is a creative activity which has its source in a Creator God, and the means by which there is a world for us. It enters all that we do: for example, the establishing of meaning. Meaning is not a mode of the real, which one only needs to look at to see; it is an absence to be looked for, in the sweat of one's face, and when meaning occurs doesn't it have a kind of aesthetic consonance, rather like a poem? Poetry intensifies our work, and makes it self-conscious. Its imitation – I am thinking of the *mimesis* of Aristotle, which is fortunately far more than a reproduction – is a dream, a miming of the real which aims to understand it by transposing it. Poetry is research, experiment, hypothesis; it sets up an optative or subjunctive world, and Aristotle might have pushed his theory about imitation being 'natural to man' a stage further, by adding, to the other explanations of the pleasure it procures, the fact that it enables one to enter the domain of the possible.

* * *

So as to understand imagination I have been exploring dream, in the perspective not of psychoanalysis but of poetry. For the very existence of dream, whether literal dream, or reverie, or vision, and the fact that it calls up other worlds, or this world undergoing all possible and imaginable transformations, suggests that the real does not fully satisfy (a glaringly obvious fact whose cause we

habitually neglect to inquire into), and that the real is maybe incomplete. Mere sleep is already a hint, since in sleep too we are neither exactly here nor precisely elsewhere. Isn't all poetry, in practice, what Nerval refers to in the third section of *Aurélia* as 'l'épanchement du songe dans la vie réelle', the pouring out of dream into real life? The poem is the night of dream in the daylight world, and the hope is that it will come to us through the gates of horn rather than of ivory, and that one morning we shall awake from the imaginary to find ourselves in the Real.

Hence the interest of Jacob's dream in the twenty-eighth chapter of Genesis. Jacob sees the angels of God ascending and descending a ladder between the earth and heaven, and he hears God speak to him. Curiously, everything centres on the idea, or rather the experience, of a place. His first words on awaking are: 'Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not.' He learns of the hidden presence, in this place but no doubt also in all places, of the divine, and the angelic, which as soon as he has awoken from the dream returns to being invisible. Far from providing him with fantasy, or teaching him an original way of feigning, dream has simply purified his inner perception so that he can realise what the facts are. He then declares: 'How dreadful is this place!' for 'this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven'. These few words are among the most arresting, and heady, in the whole Bible. They suggest that the house of God, or the entry to heaven – the locus of the world renewed, of dream fulfilled, of *l'imagination au pouvoir* – is not an elsewhere, a 'beyond', but a 'here', the place where one happens to find oneself. *This* is the gate of heaven. The place has been transformed for Jacob exactly as a poet might wish, so that a chance location becomes the site of the universal.

To consider poetry with any kind of real attention is to be led eventually to consider what it is to be a human and to inhabit a world. And one sees that God does not come down and live in Jacob's tents, and that Jacob is not ravished into heaven. Once out of the dream, the two domains remain together while nevertheless keeping their distance. If we live (in one perspective) by imagination, this involves neither making of it an idol at the expense of the world, nor on the contrary renouncing it in favour of the world. Distance is our dwelling. A great lesson of poetry, its truth, is surely that one must challenge the real by opening it continually to the imagination which changes it, and challenge the imagination, which is no god, by confronting it continually with the real which

resists it: that one must pass dialectically from real to dream, in affirming the virtualities of poetry, of language, of mind, only to affirm with the next breath, and as energetically, everything which surpasses us, everything which is not waiting for us so as to exist. If dream is the freedom of the real, beginning with the most modest of figures, the real is also the freedom of dream.

Poetry has often been presented, since Romanticism, as a salvation, and that is no doubt asking too much. It certainly does not save us from the real: it saves us, if at all, *within* the real. It works for a real that is more real. The poet is an imaginative in the sense that he is a maker of images, and a native of the place.

4

Romanticism and After

Yeats and his friends were not, as it turned out, 'the last romantics', and nor, I dare say, are we.[8] Romanticism has often been dismissed but it does not go away. The concerns of the Romantics still have urgency for us, and their quarrels with themselves and with each other need still to be listened to. Many of our opportunities, as writers and readers, and many of our problems, though not all, lie within Romanticism, nearly two hundred years after the publication of *Lyrical Ballads*.

A Romantic ambition was to declare and to enact the power of mind and the corresponding power of poetry. The ambition was genuinely revolutionary, and it aligned writing, at least potentially, with the making of a future. We can learn from the way the Romantics negotiated with these powers, and with the dangers which they introduced. Not only Christian readers might be mostly sensitive to the dangers: with the Romantics, poetry aims to place itself at the centre, of the intellectual and moral life of the nation and of the spiritual life, at the expense of religion, philosophy and science. In some cases, it endeavours to replace Christianity and to promote a novel civilisation, by substituting itself, as a source of knowledge and as a way of experiencing, for theology and grace. In this perspective, it is yet another of the succession of bids by which, instead of 'dressing' the earth for God and under his authority – or if you prefer, cultivating the earth with a view to its own interests – we endeavour to appropriate it. Descartes had predicted with some success, towards the end of the *Discourse on Method*, that a 'practical philosophy' would make us 'masters and possessors of nature'; Romantic imagination, though fostered in Blake, Wordsworth and Coleridge by a wealth of Christian doctrine, can become the means, by 'half-creating' the world, of rendering nature *ours* even more radically. And so it can persuade its practitioners, at certain moments of guilt and self-challenge, that all poetry, all art, is a threat to life. Coleridge declared for himself, in a Notebook entry of 1796: 'Poetry – excites us to artificial feelings – makes us callous to real ones'. The thought has exercised Geoffrey Hill, in *The Lords of Limit* (page 4), and it does possess a

fearfulness with which, in all honesty, one has to deal. I have already quoted Wordsworth's 'Processions'. He has an equally shocking parenthesis in the third of the 'Essays on Epitaphs', when confronting 'the adversary of Nature (call that adversary Art or by what name you will) . . .' It is true that he is distinguishing false poetry from genuine, yet the abruptness of the interjection, and the calling of attention to the name of the adversary, suggest a deep and perhaps not quite acknowledged – certainly not quite stated – suspicion of poetry, since the usual name of 'the adversary' is Satan.

What we are considering here, in the perspective of the making of many books, is the danger of literature as a possible rival to life, and of imagination as a potential rival to the real. We still need to find ways of working through these questions, over whatever time it takes. I propose to think in turn about the question of the outside world and the question of the self, and to develop the former by looking at two areas of interrogation and contradiction within Romanticism itself.

The first concerns Wordsworth and Blake. Wordsworth begins the preface to his *Poems* of 1815 (published five years after the 'Essays on Epitaphs' and seven years before 'Processions'), with an assured, almost Johnsonian, statement of his position, a position whose priorities are startling if we think of him, as I am sure we must, as the prophet of the imagination, the visionary of the earthly paradise:

> The powers requisite for the production of poetry are: first, those of Observation and Description, – i.e. the ability to observe with accuracy things as they are in themselves, and with fidelity to describe them, unmodified by any passion or feeling existing in the mind of the describer . . . This power, though indispensable to a Poet, is one which he employs only in submission to necessity, and never for a continuance of time: as its exercise supposes all the higher qualities of the mind to be passive, and in a state of subjection to external objects . . . 2ndly, Sensibility, – which, the more exquisite it is, the wider will be the range of a poet's perceptions; and the more will he be incited to observe objects, both as they exist in themselves and as re-acted upon by his own mind.

The other requisite powers are Reflection; Imagination and Fancy,

'to modify, to create, and to associate'; Invention; and Judgement. The priority given to observation and description suggests a 'realism' that hardly assorts with one's general picture of Romantic poetry, and when Rimbaud later describes illuminist, 'Satanic' writing in a Romantic vein, in the passage of *Une saison en enfer* to which I referred in the previous chapter, he notes 'the absence of the descriptive or instructive faculties'. Wordsworth supposes that poetry begins as one looks at the world outside, at 'things as they are in themselves'; he is free both of the scepticism of later writers as to the possibility of perceiving a world 'as it is', and of the desire to devalue the real in favour of art. Poetry begins by effacing the needs of self, so that the description of a world which is other may be unmodified by personal affectivity. It is true that this purity of looking, which is intended to guarantee for the poem the presence of what is beyond the poet, is far from being sufficient in itself, since the function of poetry is to bring this otherness into contact with human experience; as soon as objectivity is assured, the 'higher qualities of the mind' are called on to intervene. Even sensibility, however, is directed towards the world: its power is to widen the range of a poet's perceptions – to open him to the scope of the real – and to give him objects *at one and the same time* in the colours with which his humanity has clothed them and in themselves. Only the fourth power is 'Imagination and Fancy', and while the powers are by no means listed in order of importance, it is significant that the modifying and creative power of the imagination is adduced *after* the reality to be modified and new-created has been established. Wordsworth's is a poetics which endeavours, heroically, to do justice both to the abundance and difference of the world, and to the power of the human mind. The strong discriminations are surely right, though one might prefer an approach to the external less grudging and more warm than what is implied in the phrase 'only in submission to reality'.

And yet Blake attacked this passage, along with a number of others in Wordsworth, for the opposite reason, and in the name of Christianity. In his annotations of the *Poems* of 1815, his comment on the above is: 'One Power alone makes a Poet: Imagination, The Divine Vision'. His peremptory confidence comes in part from a disdain of nature, which is *not even* a dictionary. Against the title of Wordsworth's poem, 'Influence of Natural Objects In calling forth and strengthening the Imagination in Boyhood and early Youth', he writes: 'Natural Objects always did & now do weaken,

deaden & obliterate Imagination in Me. Wordsworth must know that what he Writes Valuable is Not to be found in Nature'. The conviction is as trenchant as one could wish, and the crescendo of verbs in the first sentence states it once and for all. One might simply be satisfied with disagreeing, or agreeing, but Blake's fierceness also comes from a belief that the world is fallen, and those who share that belief have to be prepared to stay with him for a while. What of this fleering of 'My heart leaps up . . .', the poem of the rainbow and of 'natural piety': 'There is no such Thing as Natural Piety Because The Natural Man is at Enmity with God'? Does Wordsworth consider the fact that – according to his creed – the nature with which he communes, along with the self which he brings to that communion, are fallen away from the God to whom he continually refers, and from a condition in which a full response to the Biblical image of the rainbow would be a *natural* leap upwards? It seems not, despite his sense of exclusion from Eden; and his desire for wholeness ('The Child is father of the Man;/And I could wish my days to be/Bound each to each'), though imaginatively seductive and truly expressive of a profound human wish, is indeed natural, in making no allowance for the unbindings, the separations, that a supernatural and Christian wholeness may require.

Blake insists: 'I see in Wordsworth the Natural Man rising up against the Spiritual Man Continually, & then he is No Poet but a Heathen Philosopher at Enmity against all true Poetry or Inspiration'. Is this unjust? I have to say that I don't know, but I do know that, for anyone who responds to it, the word 'Spiritual' broaches a radical question which is perhaps better asked of one's own work than of another man's. Even if it is unjust, it is highly pertinent, given the ambition of the new poetry, including Blake's own poetry, to become a means of knowing and a way of experiencing, to change the world, and above all to have dealings with the transcendent. By his very intemperance, the earliest of the Romantics poses the fundamental question about Romanticism and its aftermath, which is the religious question.

Blake's poetics, where imagination is unashamedly and self-delightingly the antagonist of the natural world, is also one which forces into greater self-awareness the harmonious dialectic of object and image for which I argued at the end of the previous chapter. The object which resists the image belongs to a fallen world. Against Blake, the image which transforms the object belongs to a

fallen intelligence. But it may be preferable to move outside this Christian manner of discussing the problem, and to do so we can take up the Milton–Keats relationship where we left it. It was a question for Keats (in the letter of 22 November 1817 to Benjamin Bailey) of 'the truth of Imagination', of Adam as the imaginative poet whose dream leads him not into private fantasy but into the reality of a world transformed. Keats then places the dream in the context of a 'favorite Speculation', 'that we shall enjoy ourselves here after by having what we called happiness on Earth repeated in a finer tone . . . Adam's dream will do here and seems to be a conviction that Imagination and its empyreal reflection is the same as human Life and its Spiritual repetition'. So the work of the imagination is anticipatory: as Adam awoke from an earth 'scarce pleasant' by comparison into a 'garden of bliss' (Book VIII, lines 306, 299), so imagination promises that we shall wake, 'here' and 'after', to a spiritual repetition of earthly life in a finer tone. Despite the differences one recalls, as part of the Romantic dream, Nerval's conviction in *Aurélia* that 'we are immortal and we retain here the images of the world we have inhabited'.

It is difficult to see what ontological status Keats is giving to the 'reality to come', of which 'a Life of Sensations' is the 'Shadow'. When he discusses shadow and reality in the process of time, he says this: 'the simple imaginative Mind may have its rewards in the repetition of its own silent Working coming continually on the Spirit with a fine Suddenness – to compare great things with small – have you never been Surprised with an old Melody – in a delicious place – by a delicious voice, felt over again your very Speculations and Surmises at the time it first operated on your Soul – do you not remember forming to yourself the singer's face more beautiful than it was possible and yet with the elevation of the Moment you did not think so – even then you were mounted on the Wings of Imagination so high – that the Prototype must be here after – the delicious face you will see'. In a meditation on memory and on surprise which is almost exactly the reverse of Proust's, while being similarly concerned for present ecstasy, Keats sees the actual and more 'delicious' repetition of an experience as the sustainer and the partial fulfilment of an earlier act of enhancing imagination, as a sign of the power of dream eventually to enter waking life.

Keats lights on Adam's dream from a conviction about imagination transforming the earth. Yet only a year and a half later, in

May 1819, didn't he return to the Edenic dream in the 'Ode to a Nightingale', so as to re-write it and voice his misgivings? The presence of Milton's lines in the ode is clear once one has seen it. Sleep seizes Adam's 'drowsed sense' (VIII 289), while Keats, or the 'I' of his poem, sinks Lethe-wards as a 'drowsy' numbness pains his 'sense' (lines 1–2). Adam becomes 'insensible' (290), has the untroubled thought that he might be about to 'dissolve' (290) into his former state of non-existence, and then, through the power of his 'fancy' (294), gazes on all the beauties of a 'garden of bliss' (299). Keats, in a state like that induced by a 'dull' opiate (3), observes the 'happiness' (6), the 'ecstasy' (58), of a nightingale in another garden, but is tempted to 'dissolve' (21) as a forgetting, an escape, and becomes persuaded that 'fancy' is a cheat (73). Adam 'waked' (309), but when the bird disappears, like Eve in the second dream, Keats is unsure whether he 'wakes' or sleeps (80), and, rather than finding truth, he allows his final lines to disperse in unanswered questions.

Keats reworks the passage in Milton through doubt, it seems, of his own recent assurance, and so as to ask whether the dream of an Eden, of a 'finer', more 'spiritual' world perceived when mounting on 'the wings of imagination', is a deception, a flight from the world in which one is obliged to live and to suffer. The poem moves towards poetry, towards singing 'in full-throated ease' (10), drinking from Hippocrene on the mount sacred to the muses (16), flying on the 'wings of Poesy' (33), 'pouring forth' one's soul abroad in 'ecstasy' (57–8); but it pulls back to 'here' – after the rise to the Queen–Moon and the stars: 'But here there is no light' (38), and, most dramatically, after a line-break in the catalogue of human pains: 'The weariness, the fever, and the fret / Here . . .' (23–4).

The ode is not the last expression of the poetics of Romanticism, nor is it Keats's only word on the subject. Part of its importance lies nevertheless in the fact that, from the inside of a poetic movement which took its powers and its responsibilities very seriously, it calls poetry into question and leaves the value of the imagination undecided.

* * *

Hopkins was to engage with the poem, as part of what seems, in one perspective, to be an attempt to solve the problem of the

Romantic lyric. Imagination for the Romantics was itself an attempt to resolve a difficulty, created by the Cartesian separation between body and mind: between an infinite exteriority which is the world of extension, and an interiority which is also infinite in its way and which it is tempting to call the world of intention, or of personal intensity. The function of poetry in such a scheme would be to create a redemptive route between consciousness and matter, between an inner world and an outer. The imagination would seize, humanise and save the non-human world by half-creating it. Maybe the difficulty was wrongly understood: certainly, the best-known responses insisted on the priority, the liberty of the imagination with respect to the world. Yet since so much depended on the resources within the poet, the world was vulnerable to his loss of creativity, and the difficulty was not removed but displaced: the mind was no longer passive, but the body of the world was, or could become so. According to Coleridge, in the most celebrated passage of the *Biographia Literaria* (chapter 13), while the imagination is essentially 'vital', 'all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead'. That last word is terrible in the extreme. It will only need the vitality of the mind to go as well for one to be left with the perplexities where, say, Eliot found himself in his early poems.

Hopkins seeks to overcome the problem, to ride over it, by the illuminatingly conventional expedient of seeing the world as God's creation. Or rather: there is no expedience, since this is how Hopkins *does* see. We do not know at what point in the writing of 'God's Grandeur' he thought of relating it to Keats's ode by the line 'Generations have trod, have trod, have trod', which recalls 'No hungry generations tread thee down' at line 62 (as well as the passage in Wordsworth's *Excursion* which Keats's line already echoes). The effect of the words is nevertheless to place the world of human pain over against, not 'Poesy', imagination, 'vision', but a 'nature' which is 'never spent' because it is unstoppably active, 'charged' – of all things – with the grandeur of God. Far from being fixed and dead, it acts in advance of our noticing it, and independently of the intervention of human energy; it teaches, rather than waiting for our lessons. 'God's Grandeur' also has its bird, but whereas Keats's nightingale departs in the final lines, Hopkins's dove-like Holy Ghost enables the morning to 'spring' in the east, and draws the poet to an outward and wide-awake sighting of the dawn and of the Spirit.

'The Windhover' turns similarly from the 'ecstasy' of Keats's

nightingale as it pours forth its soul abroad (line 58) to the 'ecstacy' (Hopkins's spelling) of a falcon in flight. Falcons, like kingfishers but unlike nightingales and skylarks, do not sing. So they are not taken as emblems of the poet; their office is to be themselves. Hopkins too has his poems about nightingales and larks, yet what the bird 'pours' in 'The Sea and the Skylark' is not its soul but 'music'. And because the world is 'charged', the poet is not affected by the bird: he is 'stirred for' it, but above all he meets, encounters, 'catches' it. The poem is alert – alerted – to the goings-on out there, in a world already teeming with activity.

Strangely, the 'Ode to a Nightingale', which is itself a re-writing of lines in *Paradise Lost*, is also re-written in Hardy's 'The Darkling Thrush' and Yeats's 'Sailing to Byzantium' and 'Byzantium', and these re-writings too are relevant here. 'Fervourless' rather than pained with a drowsy numbness, Hardy listens to a 'darkling' thrush as Keats listens 'darkling' to a nightingale (51). The thrush 'flings his soul' in 'such ecstatic sound', as the nightingale 'pours forth' his 'soul' in 'such an ecstasy'. The anxiety about poetry continues, though in Hardy it takes a different (and more Coleridgean) form: 'The tangled bine-stems scored the sky / Like strings of broken lyres'; while the religious overtones of the nightingale's 'requiem' (60) or 'anthem' (75) remain in the thrush's 'evensong'. Those overtones are firmer, however, in Hardy's poem, for its closing uncertainty – 'I could think there trembled through / His happy good-night air / Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew / And I was unaware' – is itself, unlike Keats's questioning, religious. In a mortified world, of 'dregs', 'shrunken'-ness and 'broken lyres' – of 'spectre', 'corpse', 'crypt', and the contrary music of the wind's 'death-lament' – the blessed Hope is persuasive, insofar as it is allowed to be persuasive, because the bird who may know of it is itself mortified: 'aged . . . frail, gaunt, and small', its feathers 'blast-beruffled'. Not in 'full-throated' ease but giving itself to a 'full-hearted' evensong, the bird's 'voice' is not something apart, but arises from the natural, and the creative, distress.

'The Darkling Thrush' is another response to Keats's ode in terms of outward-turned attention, by a poet who cannot call simply and entirely on Hopkins's faith. Yeats, on the contrary, closes like Keats with the power of the imagination, through a bird now made of gold and set upon a golden bough. 'Byzantium' in particular, with its 'disdain' of 'All that man is, / All mere complexities, / The fury and the mire of human veins', is a kind of

demonic parody of Keats's ode, which never 'quite forgets' the human sufferings detailed in its third stanza. For the work of the imagination in Yeats is bitter, agonising, lethal. Keats's resistance to the temptation to 'dissolve' is quite overgone by a determination to pass 'out of nature' (the lordly relation of the golden to the natural also suggests a parody of Sidney), and, by a re-writing antithetical to that of Hopkins, Yeats develops to a desperate extremity the re-creative, 'purgative', energy of imagination, so that the appetite of vision, of art, can be satisfied.

The question of the 'real' world has of course continued to be exacerbated and exasperated into our own time, and those are no longer quite the terms in which it is approached. The question for us is whether it is meaningful to think of a reality independent of the structure of consciousness or of language. I shall return to it in later chapters, though I presume that we are not actually going to solve the problem; we learn more from asking why it should exist, since the problem itself is not simply a natural *given*. (The prior question as to why there is a problem often tells us more than any putative answers. If there is a God, for example, the most astonishing thing in our experience is that most people do not believe in Him, and that fact in itself would speak volumes about the human condition, and incidentally makes the so-called proofs of God's existence absurd.)

A related problem, as posed by Romanticism, is that of the self. Romantic egotism, the self as both self-absorbed and world-absorbing, seems to invite, where it exists, a simple, critical response, and I find that a number of the writers among our contemporaries whom I most respect place just such a response at the centre of a general mistrust of Romanticism. They may be right; they can certainly adduce a deal of evidence. I don't wish to pursue the question in connection with the Romantics themselves, though I should like to salute in passing at least the intention of a passage like this from the second chapter of Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*: 'it is no less an essential mark of true genius that its sensibility is excited by any other cause more powerfully than by its own personal interests . . . because [the] feelings [of the man of genius] have been habitually associated with thoughts and images, to the number, clearness and vivacity of which the sensation of self is always in an inverse proportion'. That seems to me part of the lesson which Charles Tomlinson is teaching us over again – not in precept but in performance – and of the three qualities of thoughts

and images which are enhanced, according to Coleridge, by a diminution of the sensation of self, 'number' is surely the most striking. As the sun sets, the stars multiply.

Here too, Hopkins engaged with the problem radically. In the poem, 'As kingfishers catch fire', the world is ablaze with act: kingfishers 'catch' fire, dragonflies 'draw' flame, stones 'ring' in wells, a tucked string 'tells'. (We are a world away from the reductive, dispiriting notion of reality as a 'text' to be 'read'.) A bell finds tongue to 'fling out broad its name', but this is no bird with a man-like throat and voice, and no soul is being poured out. For everything is a self, from the most animated to the inanimate, and being a self does not involve having a subjectivity, an inwardness, to express. What Hopkins discovers is a kind of objective self: there is a world, and there is an *I* which is one of that world's innumerable *I*'s, a created self in the chorus of created selves. At least within grace, that self is not prior to, independent of, partially withdrawn from, its actions: 'the just man justices'. It is not being which founds the self but doing. 'Each mortal thing', indeed, 'does one thing', and in the exhilaration of moving through the poem one can easily miss the contrary strain of 'mortal', and the confidence with which Hopkins sees the reality of self *augmented* by its mortality, by its participation in a 'fire' through and beyond the world, which, in the terms of the poem 'That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire', shows, reduces to ash, and then resurrects.

To articulate this new sense of self Hopkins has to devise a new vocabulary. So it is not even a question of a man's 'doings' but of his 'goings', and each thing similarly 'goes its self', where 'goes' is transitive. The expression is a gloss on the invented verb 'to selve': there could hardly be a more succinct statement of the idea that a self is not a noun to be described but a verb to be activated. And so Hopkins can say 'I', even to the point of stressing it ('I say more') as the first word of the sestet, yet without self-regard; and he can compose a poem about self which is not subjective, and whose objectivity is not achieved by its being descriptive.

One knows from the later so-called 'terrible' sonnets that this was not a position Hopkins came to simply because he was at ease with himself. For of course there is subjectivity in Hopkins, a 'world within' ('The times are nightfall'), a 'close heart's vault' ('The Candle Indoors'), where God ought to be dwelling but where Hopkins also experiences sin and the effects of sin. At such times, as in 'I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day', Hopkins is 'gall'

and 'heartburn', he 'tastes' himself, and he compares himself to the damned in his knowledge of his own 'sweating' self. But is this merely Victorian self-consciousness? 'Each mortal thing' in the 'kingfishers' poem is also perceived as if it were enacting and even displaying a self: '*myself* it speaks and spells, / Crying *What I do is me: for that I came*', but the last phrase gives the theological and teleological reason for this 'selving'. One needs to consider also the introduction to the poem 'Henry Purcell': 'The poet wishes well to the divine genius of Purcell and praises him that, whereas other musicians have given utterance to the moods of man's mind, he has, beyond that, uttered in notes the very make and species of man as created both in him and in all men generally'. This surely cuts right across Victorian individualism – as it cuts across the 'moods' of the French Symbolists and the Romantics – by positing a different kind of expressiveness and a different kind of self. A man is most himself not when he is most distinctive but when he is closest to 'the species of man as created', most near, as Hopkins might have added, to the divine image; when he is what he 'came for'.[9] Insofar as that is achieved, the self need not be fled from: hence the joyful self-awareness, the humility without false modesty, of what one might call the 'wonderful' sonnets, and of 'That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire':

> I am all at once what Christ is, since he was what I am, and
> This Jack, joke, poor potsherd, patch, matchwood, immortal diamond,
> Is immortal diamond.

And don't the terrible sonnets themselves labour through an anguish which is Hopkins's own so as to become the utterance, not only of his personal troubles but, beyond that, of the very 'make' of a man, of all men, in a state of desolation?

In dealing with the self, Hopkins's concern is still for the real, for a world which *is*. Here too, of course, the question has become more snarled in our own time, and the terms for discussing it have changed. Here too we are likely to approach the question in part through language. I shall address it directly in a later chapter. I wanted in the meantime to introduce Hopkins as a kind of marker, and to hear that voice at once rare and yet central in its catholicity.

5

Pierre Reverdy

The work of Pierre Reverdy (1889–1960) is little known in England, outside the confines of French studies. I am not aware of any poet for whom he has been important, though Charles Tomlinson tells me that 'Urlicht' and 'Poem' in his *Written on Water* were composed in Reverdy's manner. The same is true, I believe, of America, despite the fact that he has been the leading influence on Kenneth Rexroth. (Rexroth also claims to trace that influence on through Robert Creeley and Gary Snyder to 'whole schools of younger people', which may be so but certainly does not sound very plausible.)[10] This chapter is not, however, an introduction to Reverdy. I want to look hard at certain things in his writing, so as to celebrate them, and so as to bring the discussion in the last chapters forward in time.

Matisse 'is a painter', he says in an essay of 1958, 'and, by his work, he places one before "Painting"'.[11] The simple clarity of the idea clears and concentrates the mind. The work of Matisse offers, according to Reverdy, neither reality nor a way of seeing reality. One might say of Reverdy himself that he places one constantly before 'Poetry'.

To explore the idea, one needs to think alongside Reverdy about some of the things which mattered most to him, and which still have importance for us. Among his essays, the earliest are the most exciting. Take this typically clean and confident passage from his review *Nord-Sud*, founded in 1917: 'One must prefer an art which asks of life only the elements of reality that it requires, and which achieves, with the aid of these elements and of new and purely artistic means, and while copying nothing and imitating nothing, the creation of a work of art for its own sake. This work must have a reality proper to itself, an artistic usefulness, its own independent life; it will evoke nothing other than itself. Of what object other than a work of art does one require that it should resemble something other than itself?'[12] The distinction between art and reality comes from Baudelaire and from Poe, and the notion of art for the sake of art was not exactly original, but Reverdy's thinking has a precision which is his own. For one thing, reality is

to furnish *elements* for an art which processes them according to its own *means*. The elements themselves are to be chosen according to novel criteria. By comparing passages from Reverdy and from Mallarmé, one can see what is new in his poetics:

> Since an object no longer enters except as an element, the task will be, not to show what it looks like but to disengage, with a view to the painting, what is eternal and constant (for example, the round shape of a glass, etc.) while excluding the rest.
>
> ('Sur le cubisme', *Nord-Sud*, 19)

> Abolished, the claim . . . of including in the subtle paper of the volume anything other than, for example, the horror of the forest, or the silent thunder scattered in the foliage; not the intrinsic dense wood of the trees.
>
> ('Crise de vers', in *Variations sur un sujet*)

'The round shape of a glass', 'the horror of the forest': Reverdy refuses Mallarmé's method of 'suggestion' and, at least when he is thinking as a critic and considering the new painting, he refuses the pathetic.

Above all, he separates *creation* from *copy* and from *imitation*. This would be banal were it not that he also distinguishes, in other writings of the period, *presentation* from *representation* (*Nord-Sud*, 87–8, 133), and that he declines to *interpret* (40–1). It seems that poetry is destined, at this heroic moment of the *début de siècle*, to abstain from reality, to free itself from all the ties with reality that it had ever imagined. A poem, like a painting, becomes something one adds to the world.

If we had only the writings of Apollinaire and of the other theorists of Cubism, we should not, I think, find such a lucid arrangement of ideas. It creates problems, of course, and I shall not neglect them; for the moment I prefer to stay with it and to enjoy it. For Reverdy also had a gift for phrasing, and certain of his maxims are still topical: for example, 'the property of a literary work is not to be conceivable or realisable otherwise than in words' (*Nord-Sud*, 53–4). He had a healthy, a sane, way of thinking which saved him from any kind of pedantry: he writes as a poet among poets and among painters. One could quote any number of literary theorists as convinced as he was about the otherness of the work, and all saying with one or another set of words that there is no

hors texte; but when Reverdy writes that 'truth in art is enclosed in the work itself like life in an animal' (*Note*, 21), he is speaking of what he knows, and he makes one aware, in a new way, of the life of the poem.

One might also note the rediscovery of the past in this 'absolutely modern' aesthetic. There is nothing more classical, or neoclassical, after all, than to insist time and again on the 'proper' means, on 'appropriate' means, on the *appropriation . . . totale*, the total adaptation, of means (*Nord-Sud*, 17, 20). It was a system of rules which provided neoclassical art with a similarly autonomous domain (protected by punctilious frontier guards: into certain parts of the territory you could bring a steed but not a horse), and which also, incidentally, made neoclassical 'imitation' very different from the kind of imitation-as-reproduction which Reverdy rejected. Presumably his readers have also seen that Reverdy's creative ideal: *'de rien faire quelque chose'*, from nothing, make something (*Nord-Sud*, 56), recalls the preface to Racine's *Bérénice*: 'toute l'invention consiste à faire quelque chose de rien', invention consists in making something from nothing. For Reverdy, it is a matter of how the initial anecdote from life relates to the means of art: 'it was natural that one should reach a period when literary means would finally become preponderant, with the anecdote reduced to being a qualitative element' (ibid.). In the same way, the 'something' of Racine is a tragedy, that is, a literary work having its proper means and its appropriate emotion, which the same preface calls 'majestic sadness'; while the 'nothing' of which it is made, the 'element of reality' which it uses, is an anecdote of considerable tenuity: Titus sends Bérénice away from Rome 'despite himself and despite her'. It is, in fact, the classical turn of Reverdy's aesthetic (of which Rexroth was aware) which explains, and draws back towards life, his notion of the work 'for its own sake'.

Reverdy also rediscovers an illuminating and dangerous poetics of the Renaissance. Here are two sentences from the essay on Matisse, which reiterate the ideas of the cubist period four decades later: 'The invention of forms has replaced the conventional imagination of the real. Imagination no longer operates on the subject . . . to be represented; it operates freely, within the limits of the canvas which must be filled with forms and colours to endow it, on another plane, with a new reality of which the painter is the only inventor' (*Note*, 174). This surely calls to mind famous words of Sidney, in the *Apology for Poetry*: 'Only the poet, disdaining

to be tied to any such subjection [to Nature], lifted up with the vigour of his own invention, doth grow in effect into another nature, in making things either better than Nature bringeth forth, or, quite anew . . .'

The separation of world and poem is even keener in terms of the emotions. Poetry for Reverdy does not express the emotions one experiences in life. It creates 'a new and purely poetic emotion', 'a purely artistic emotion' (*Nord-Sud*, 41, 46), and even 'another kind of emotion'.[13] If we are prepared to follow him, he is proposing something quite extraordinary, the existence of emotions outside of 'reality'. He returns to the point as late as 1950, in an essay with the significant title, 'Cette émotion appelée poésie', that emotion whose name is poetry: 'the ambition and the aim [of the poet] are to create . . . a particular emotion which the things of nature, in their place, are not able to induce . . . an emotion which only art can give'.[14] Art is necessary, quite simply because without it we should not experience certain of the emotions of which we are capable.

Here too, Reverdy is not thinking as a philosopher. He will write five years later: 'the tellers of anecdotes fashion an emotion [une émotion] rather than a work which may become, in the fulness of time, moving [*émouvante*]. According to how one approaches it, one creates the work either for itself or for an already known emotion which its task will be to provoke. In the latter case, one can see that nothing unexpected, or new, or troubling for the author himself can possibly emerge' (*Note*, 121). It was the practice of poetry, or rather of poems, which provided Reverdy with this experience of 'another kind of emotion', an emotion which could not figure in a treatise on the passions and which surprises even the poet. The work of art must be separate from life so that it can add to life.

Eliot comes to mind, rather intriguingly. He is not much referred to in discussions of Reverdy, and Reverdy is never referred to, as far as I know, in discussions of Eliot. Yet 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', of 1919, recalls writings of Reverdy from 1917 and 1918. For Eliot too, poetry can offer 'a new art emotion'. The poet's concern is not with real emotions but with 'the intensity of the artistic process', while for Reverdy his concern is not with a 'felt emotion' but with 'creation through concentration' (*Nord-Sud*, 135). They meet above all in their adherence to what Lautréamont had already called 'impersonal' poetry. Reverdy writes: 'It is a

mistake to want the emotion which produces the work to be identical to the emotion which the work will produce in its turn. One is a point of departure, the other a result. The whole of art lies between these two poles' (*Nord-Sud*, 134). Eliot will be even more trenchant: 'It is not in his personal emotions, the emotions provoked by particular events in his life, that the poet is in any way remarkable or interesting. His particular emotions may be simple, or crude, or flat. The emotion in his poetry will be a very complex thing . . .' Reverdy distinguishes between 'the *sentimental* personality of the artist and the one which arises from *personal* means acquired and employed. The first participates in the artist's life and is foreign to art . . .' (*Nord-Sud*, 60). Eliot will claim that 'the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates; the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its material'.

Curiously, Eliot could also have influenced Reverdy. According to the essay 'Poésie', of 1924, the poet is 'the ideal receptacle for all exterior manifestations, for all the movements of beings and of things' (*Nord-Sud*, 205). Though less extroversively, the mind of the poet was already for Eliot 'a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images'. Reverdy denies, in *Le gant de crin* of 1927, that impersonality is an easy option: 'there is the impersonality of the weak, who can only copy, plagiarise or imitate', but there is also 'the superior impersonality of the strong, who, passing beyond ordinary bounds, rise all the higher the more they free themselves from the signs of their personality' (page 58). Eliot had already declared, with considerably more anxiety, that 'only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things'.

The purpose of this digression has not been to sniff out sources. I know no mention of Reverdy by Eliot, nor of Eliot by Reverdy, and I have seen no evidence that they even read each other. It is certain, on the other hand, that Eliot read Remy de Gourmont, among others. I am simply surprised and interested by the closeness of a number of their ideas, and pleased to be able to underline the fact that the poetic theory of their period was created by poets. This ought to be evident, and for many it will be; but in some quarters rather more trust is placed in the official theorists of literature. If a student wanted to think about the relations between reality and art, between the life of the author and the life

of the work, wouldn't he be advised to read, say, the writings of the Russian Formalists, rather than *Nord-Sud* or *The Sacred Wood*? The terrain of the Formalists, after all, was literary studies; they were looking to develop a critical methodology, whereas Reverdy and Eliot were thinking about how to write poems. It pays to call their undertaking 'individual' and 'subjective' and their ideas a matter of personal 'prejudice', alien to the way of the University.

But what does a 'poetic' emotion mean? How does poetry give rise, as one reads or remembers it, to 'new' emotions? Is it not by causing us to enter, precisely, the domain of poetry? We experience, not superhuman or extra-terrestrial emotions, but natural emotions placed within an artistic configuration and raised to a new order. (I am thinking of successful poems: the sadness of a bad poem is the promise of a new order which is not kept.) Perhaps this is one of the meanings of Aristotle's *catharsis*. Pity and terror, and 'such emotions', are purified in part by the very fact of being roused in the theatre, of being fictionalised. The spectator feels them, in a new way, in the otherness of an art-work.

Reverdy, like Eliot, goes further. This is the end of 'Surprise d'en haut' from the collection *La lucarne ovale*:

> La lune se cache dans un seau d'eau
> Un ange sur le toit joue au cerceau
> La maison s'écroule
>
> Dans le ruisseau il y a une chanson qui coule

(*The moon hides in a pail of water / An angel on the roof plays with a hoop / The house collapses / In the stream is a song that flows*)

The lines hold together, in a single emotion complex and difficult to grasp, several contradictory emotions which are stirred by the child's game of an angel and the collapse of a house; by a moon which hides yet remains visible in the element associated with it; by a song flowing in living water and the possibility that the whole poem ('une chanson') collapses at the end and disappears in the flight of the stream, or even 'sinks' (another meaning of 'coule') under the surface. It is an emotion impossible to name, and which has no existence outside of this poem.

One must therefore cross the threshold of the poem so as to meet with it. But it would be dangerous to think of poetry as creating a world that one might inhabit, and as being adequate to

our emotional life. For Aristotle, the purification of distressing emotions seems to have a moral and cognitive value, which sends the tragic spectator away more ready for living. In Reverdy's lines, there is a continual return from the mysterious to the everyday. On the one hand, the moon cannot intentionally hide, the house does not 'really' collapse, and no one, to my knowledge, has seen an angel with a hoop. On the other hand, the most prosaic senses can hear a song in a stream, and see the moon in a bucket. The poem carries us away, but also brings us back towards reality, and towards the emotions of life.

The same alternating movement governs the image. Here too, Reverdy refreshes a topic which easily goes stale. The image is born, according to a passage well known in France, by 'the bringing together of two realities more, or less, remote' (*Nord-Sud*, 73), a process which Reverdy claims has characterised poetry from the beginning (144). At the linguistic level, 'from two words rightly coupled for the first time' is born 'mystery' (230).

Bringing two things together is, indeed, mysterious. *Two* is a magic number. It is true that a single word, or a single object, can serve as entrance to the mystery of the world, and even evoke origin. But reality changes when, through the work of the mind, two objects come together in an unexpected way, and by the simple approximating of two words language begins, when a poet is deploying it, to unsettle the world.

Two is also, on all sides, a baneful number. It denotes revolt, division, contradiction. The poet practises white magic on the very scene of black magic.

The thing to notice, however, is that mystery comes, for Reverdy, from the 'justesse' – the rightness, the appropriateness, the soundness – with which words are coupled. In the same way, if he is not alone in the period in believing that the image will be all the more strong as the relations between the two realities brought together are 'distant', he insists more than others that those relations should also be 'justes' (*Nord-Sud*, 73). He argues against the 'brutal' or 'fantastic' image (74). He sees mystery springing from an image that is 'extraordinary' and 'unforeseen', but also 'true' (230). Contrary to what one might have expected from a 'Cubist', he accepts the criterion of the real, or of our conception of the real: the image produces novelty, but only if it discovers, for the first time, what already existed potentially. The mind does not imagine the relations between two distant realities, it 'seizes' them (75).

In this, as in other matters, Reverdy is far away from Surrealism. It is true that he also insists that the 'justesse' of the relations be conceived and not perceived. It is mind 'alone' which seizes them, and when he revised the essay where this occurs ('L'Image') for *Le gant de crin*, he added: 'If the senses endorse the image entirely, they kill it for the mind' (32). That seems to me a very French thought, or at least a Cartesian one. One can agree that the poetic image is not in nature, but Reverdy would also like nature to be dominated by mind – the superiority of mind to be confirmed by the defeat of the senses.

An yet the senses, in practice, have a way of fighting back. 'Le côté bleu du ciel', from *La guitare endormie*, contains these lines:

> La boîte des nuage s'ouvre
> Et tous les oiseaux blancs s'envolent à la fois

(*The box of clouds opens / And all the white birds fly off at once*)

Isn't this a perception of the visible world, at a time of high wind, which becomes instantaneously a conception in the mind? That image, that encounter of two sorts of creatures of the air with a figure of magic who frees and multiplies them, has been grasped, surely, by the sense of sight illumined by the mind – by sight become vision while remaining sight.

The same is true of his comparisons. In his poetics, as in those of Marinetti, Breton, and the Imagists, comparison is disparaged. It is not surprising, in fact, that a poetics oriented towards the image should see the main virtue of poetry as its ability to seize objects and bring them into relation without the links of discursive thought. (One might compare this with Descartes's preference for 'intuition', the 'inspection of the mind', over syllogistic reasoning.) Yet Breton himself included, among the 'surrealist images' catalogued in the first *Surrealist Manifesto*, this comparison by Philippe Soupault: 'Une église se dressait éclatante comme une cloche' (a church rose bright – and loud – as a bell); and so as to illustrate the absence of premeditation in Reverdy's own images, he quoted among others: 'Le jour s'est déplié comme une nappe blanche' (daylight has unfolded like a white cloth).

Reverdy wrote many such comparisons, and they are not weak. This one, for example, in 'Le flot berceur' (*Cravates de chanvre*):

Le soleil s'arrête comme un nid en feu
dans les peupliers

(*The sun halts like a nest on fire / in the poplars*)

The emotion provoked here is no less intense than that of a more orthodox image elsewhere in the poem: 'Quand les feuillets de la mer se replient page par page' (when the leaves of the sea fold back page after page). If, to avoid the comparison, he had written:

Le soleil s'arrête
nid en feu dans les peupliers

(*The sun halts / nest on fire in the poplars*)

wouldn't the image have lost in mystery what it gained in brilliance? It is true that the word 'like' has more than one meaning. As a simple comparison, it traces a movement from one thing to another: it can slow thought and cool emotion. (One only needs to glance again at Soupault's 'like' to see that this need not be the case.) Reverdy's 'like' does not compare, strictly speaking, because the second term of the comparison, the nest on fire, does not exist until the comparison engenders it. The sun halts *as if*, setting behind trees, it was a nest on fire. 'Like', as I suggested in the second chapter and as the work of Michel Deguy is there to show, opens a mysterious passage in a reality being transformed.

One sees again that the senses are not baffled. The image, by means of a fiction, says the truth, and the truth is visible. The sun seen through the foliage of a tree as if it were set on a branch *is* like a nest on fire: this is a fact for the eyes as for the mind. The mind is then free to follow the suggestions of the image as it will, towards the presence of the generative sun on the earth of biological and poetic births, and maybe towards the phoenix, and the idea of a vast rebirth in fire.

Wordsworth too believed in the truth of comparison, when its source is imagination. He writes, in the preface to the *Poems* of 1815: 'When the Imagination frames a comparison, if it does not strike on the first presentation, a sense of the truth of the likeness, from the moment that it is perceived, grows – and continues to grow – upon the mind; the resemblance depending less upon outline of form and feature, than upon expression and effect; less

upon casual and outstanding, than upon inherent and internal, properties: moreover, the images invariably modify each other'. We are moving here towards an understanding of the radical difference between imagination and fancy. Wordsworth continues: 'The law under which the processes of Fancy are carried on is as capricious as the accidents of things'. Imagination is concerned with truth, fancy is indifferent to truth. We cannot always awake from the dream to find it truth, but there is a kind of dream which closes with the visible, sees into it, and says what is.

* * *

The separation of poetry from the real in Reverdy is not, after all, so simple. He maintains, often, that the work of art is 'anti-natural', but what impels us towards it is the love of nature (*Emotion*, 13). It is to be able to 'turn this love to account' that one calls on 'l'Esprit', on spirit or mind, which, far from removing one from nature, enables one to 'know more fully what one loves' (14). In his fine essay on Braque (1950), he claims that art is the 'contrary' of nature, and that nature is not man's partner in life but his enemy (*Note*, 86–7, 59). But he also says that what saved the Cubists was 'the direct and impassioned contact which they had had the intelligence and the instinct to establish and to preserve with the most vivid and humble reality – a love of what can be conceived but also of what can be touched' (75–6). He presents poetry as 'the need and the ability to imagine something other than what is and to feed on it with more delight than on reality itself', but only after having also defined poetry as 'the most tender, the most supple, the most moving, bond with nature' (89).

Nature attracts but, as she is, fails to satisfy. She herself indicates the means – art, poetry – not for going elsewhere but, on the contrary, for approaching her. For it is no superficial nature that Reverdy seeks but what he calls in *Le gant de crin*, with a vocabulary extraordinarily open and vulnerable, 'the essence of things' (40), 'the deep and fertile source of pure reality' (28). He even believes that certain things, more than others, 'partake strictly of the real', and he names them: 'all simple, profound, unchanging things, that time neither brings nor bears away . . . Cloud and table, like sun, rain and tree, are realities; the particular shape of a piece of clothing is unreal' (43). The voice of Yves Bonnefoy is already beginning to sound.

So he writes like this, in 'La jetée' (*Les ardoises du toit*):

La voile est un morceau du port qui se détache

(*The sail is a piece of the harbour moving away*)

A piece of harbour moving away is decidedly 'something other than what is'. Art has displaced the real, and before the power of this image one might think that a nature which refused the 'lie' of poetry was indeed our enemy. The image depends, nevertheless, on contact with the humble reality of the sea shore, and with things both simple and profound. It enables one to know more fully the emotional reality of departures, the compound of intoxication and fear, of freedom and rending. It sounds the real, it hints of sources. Reverdy has 'metaphored well', as Aristotle would say, because he has perceived a resemblance, between a boat leaving a harbour and a rock breaking from the coast. He has exercised, as Coleridge would say, his imagination rather than his fancy, by re-creating and unifying the world.

An image, whether metaphor or comparison, is like two hands seeking to grasp the real. As if language were another body for the mind, a means of sensing beyond the reach of sense.

So that we should understand it better, there lies, between the world as it appears and a world of pure invention, the world spoken, the world written, the world painted. The danger is that we might be subjugated by the prestige of this new world, and prefer worded things to things. Reverdy must have felt the danger, since he works against it in *Le livre de mon bord*, one of whose aphorisms is: 'For the primitive, art is a means; for the decadent, it becomes an end'.[15] And for the civilised? Both together, surely, in the unceasing dialectic of a mutual supervision, or as another aphorism has it: 'Art by and for life, life for and by art' (144). The very shape of the sentence, a double chiasmus which is also a kind of palindrome, asserts the indissociable finality of art and life, and prohibits one from coming to a halt in either. Life and art: two other hands in search of the real.

Poetry for Reverdy is therefore a way of inhabiting the world, in the tradition of Hölderlin and Wordsworth. It is neither in things nor in books. According to the preface to *Flaques de verre*, 'it floats in the street, in the sky, in sinister workshops, over the town'. According to *Le gant de crin* (page 51), it is 'the contact of the heart

[or of the soul: of *l'âme*] with things'. It is not literature. Even less, one imagines him adding now, is it 'the text'. Isn't it language seeking to become word, and to become in particular a transitive word? As a way of life, as an activity of the whole being, poetry is: what impels so many adolescents to write poems.

But it is still poems which speak best of poetry:

Sur chaque ardoise
qui glissait du toit
on
avait écrit
un poème

La gouttière est bordée de diamants
les oiseaux les boivent

(*On each slate / sliding from the roof / someone / had written / a poem / The gutter is bordered with diamonds / the birds drink them*)

In this liminary poem, to *The Roof Slates*, one might notice: the 'magic' transposition of the slates into diamonds, through the intervention of poetry; the generosity of imagination, which nourishes the birds with a liquid that will send them off transfigured over the town; the place of poetry, which is poverty; the presence of the poet as a simple impersonality, a *one* or *someone* who almost disappears into the poem he composes. One could also notice the importance, around the printed words, of white spaces. Poetry is neither in the roof slates nor in *The Roof Slates*, but in that way of inhabiting a house, in that light of the mind which sees precious stones in the play of sunlight on water, in the simplicity and profundity of these objects and creatures of our daily life.

The poet is necessary for us to be able to inhabit the world, to discover the real. Autumn arrives for everyone, but it is a season of mists and mellow fruitfulness since Keats. According to Ecclesiastes, 'of making many books there is no end': new books will always have to be written, new poems devised, and I have considered this in terms of the distress of writing. It is, in part, a sign of our confusion, of our alienation from a world that we do not inhabit *naturally*. But the plaint can also be converted into a promise. Each generation that writes poems, and that experiences poetry, assimilates the world, and assimilates itself to the real. By naming

the world in words that are continually being renewed, poetry preserves it, and preserves us, with a view to our common destiny.

As I said at the beginning, Reverdy places us constantly before this essential work, before 'poetry'. His poetics is not without difficulties. 'Things', especially in the writings from the period of what one might call his de-conversion from Catholicism, seem to remain, finally, 'horribly indifferent and cold' (*Livre*, 232), as if the only energy, the only animation, in our universe were that of man. Yet the world – or rather the earth, and the difference is significant – draws him nevertheless, and transmits to him a sense of the real. The earth saves him from angelism. As he says himself (*Emotion*, 61), in a sentence to which attention is due: 'Poetry is an instinct in man that is . . . between reptation and flight – his instinct to create – to raise himself above his condition which binds him to the earth, but only on tiptoe'.

6

Pierre Emmanuel

Pierre Emmanuel is better known in England than Reverdy, but I want to focus on his early poetics, and this involves discussing a book which is out of print. *Poésie Raison ardente* was published in 1947, and consists of essays written over the previous ten years. Its title comes from a line in Apollinaire's 'La jolie rousse', the final poem of *Calligrammes*: 'O Soleil c'est le temps de la Raison ardente', 'Oh Sun it is the time of burning Reason'. It includes an essay on Reverdy and Mallarmé, which concludes with the thought that in both poets 'one travels to the end of a certain impasse of language' (136). Whether or not the comment is justified, the subject of this chapter is Emmanuel's own attempt to escape from that impasse.

In the course of another of the essays, 'The Poet and Myth', written when he was 22, he claims that 'no one is more aware than the poet of the cosmic power of the Word; yet no one is more disarmed when faced with the things of the world, no one is more a stranger to the names which delimit them. To the eyes of the child, the thing ('la chose') encloses the mystery of the world . . . but to the adult it is merely an object ('un objet'), an intelligible instrument, and the name attached to it does not create it, but defines it' (73). What looks like a banal distinction between the thing and the mere object, and between the world of the child and the world of the adult, is also a far from banal suggestion that of all men, the poet – that is, the person who handles words with the greatest knowledge and intimacy – is 'the stranger to names'.

We are back with Romanticism, and especially with Wordsworth, though I doubt that Emmanuel, who included in the volume an essay on Poe, was any more aware of Wordsworth than are most French poets. In the Immortality Ode there is a similar dismay at the distance, the absence, of the object, and a similar remembering, or perhaps inventing, of childhood, and of the paradise of mystery or glory in which the child is said to move. We are also in the middle of the language problem, which Romanticism left us and which is far from resolved.

'A stranger to names'; or as Emmanuel writes in the last essay of the book: 'Things on one side, the idea we have of them on the

other, and in between, the word, external to both, a mere surface contact which reveals their heterogeneity' (236). The analysis recalls Saussure, for whom an acoustic image, or signifier, leads to a concept, or signified, while making no connection with the apparent object of the word's attention. The word 'tree' opens only to the idea *tree*, while the tree itself, left out of account and obliged to put down its roots in a dry and purely hypothetical reality, remains forever inaccessible. For the scholar Saussure the arbitrary nature of the sign and the conviction that language is a self-enclosed system do not appear to have caused a great deal of disquiet, any more than they do for numerous commentators who lay aside their real concerns as people when they become public thinkers. Emmanuel, on the other hand, felt the scandal of this alienation, which he would no doubt explain by the fall of Adam, of the original master of words, who became a stranger to them as soon as he became a stranger to God.

It is a question, therefore, of saving both words and things. *Poésie Raison ardente*, published just after the war in a period when the restoration of man and the renewal of his world had precise and local urgency, exerts itself to that end, as do the works which followed. The undertaking is certainly vast, but I believe that Emmanuel's proposals carry a long way. They involve reconsidering the work of language. In the course of 'In the beginning the Word', a prose meditation from a later volume, he maintains that 'the word is an act of thought which causes the thing to be, in mind'.[16] Without denying the distance between language and the world, he sees naming as an *act* (whereas for Saussure, with his view of language as an already existing structure, the mind seems to register names passively), and above all he understands the function of this act as confering on a thing a new kind of being. The power of human language is not to create the thing in itself, since that is the prerogative of the divine Word, but to give it being 'in mind'. One remembers Heidegger, on calling 'into the word'.

So even a fallen language can satisfy. In another later essay, 'The Risk of the Word', he explores a famous passage in Mallarmé's 'Crise de vers' (beginning, 'I say: a flower . . .') which he modifies into this: 'I say: bread, and this word may do no more than name the loaf placed on the table . . . which is about to satisfy a daily hunger. And yet . . . if I open my mind, if, by an expectancy and orientation of all my being towards Being itself, I arouse that hunger for undivided meaning which constitutes the secret of

language . . . I shall find myself suddenly replenished . . . with a meaning that no commentary can touch'.[17] We cannot eat the word 'bread', or so we are told, but isn't Emmanuel right to suggest that the mind can feed on it, provided one turns towards a Being in which both the bread and the person who eats it participate, and provided also that one is sufficiently famished for a meaning which, going beyond bread, reaches for the other things essential to life? Beside the unsayable bread, which emerges both from the oven and from the hand of God, and which waits on the table but also in a world which is other, there exists precariously in the mind a bread which I rouse by pronouncing it – clumsily, of course, but possibly with an unfailing attention. No longer the limit or the definition of the thing, which serve to constrain it, the word 'bread' gives it access on the contrary to mind and to the surrounding world. And so, according to Emmanuel, one recovers the eyes of the child, and the thing becomes a centre from which 'ineffable presence radiates' (208). He had already said as much in 'The Poet and Myth': each thing is a source from which waves flow, 'nourishing and magnetising all the created world' (76). One glimpses again the poetics of Yves Bonnefoy.

Words are truly mysterious, and it is as well not to fall into a vague mysticism. I don't think Emmanuel does, but I sense the danger, and it is possible in any case to ground his ideas in a different kind of discourse. One could introduce the notions of history and memory, and I note that even these more positive notions are ones that Saussure hardly explores. The anti-Cratylic tradition is perfectly right to affirm, as Descartes does in the *Dioptrics*, that words 'in no way resemble the things which they signify'. The word 'bread' *is* arbitrary, as the Babelic presence next to it of 'pain' or 'kelyér' attests. But it also brims with history: with its own evolution and with its passage through the minds and the mouths of successive generations. It is in itself a kind of substance. The word 'tree' is in no way the tree of the forest, or of the garden – except in memory, whose function is partly to reunite men to the world by rendering the association of words and things in the mind familiar. The hero of Emmanuel's only novel says of a house where, for the first time, he feels that he is at home: 'mon regard patine les meubles', 'my look gives a patina to the furniture'.[18] Mightn't one say that words give a patina to things?

In memory, which is individual history, and in history, which is collective memory, words call things and our ideas of things slowly

together. It is not that the memory of words gives us the world as it is; the nature of things does remain inaccessible, unknowable. But the 'magic' property of memory is to modify things – to alter their mode – by welcoming them into human consciousness. Far from inertly storing the past, it works imperceptibly for a tree, or for bread, to become what the words 'tree' and 'bread' mean for us. Memory is transfigurative: it changes the world. Its work is already a kind of proto-poetry. One understands why the Greeks should have decided that Memory is the mother of the muses.

* * *

Language is too important, after all, to be left to linguists. For Emmanuel, it has an overriding importance which is quite startling. He sees the 'problem of language' as 'paramount' to the artist (7), and art as 'essentially a reflection about language' (169), since language is 'the essence of man' (170) and 'the vocation of man' (63), while the 'destiny of man' is an 'adventure in language' (235). Even when referring to the poetry of the French Resistance, he writes: 'future historians of poetry will realise that, during these hidden years, the existence of a civic poetry conscious of its aims and addressing a continually growing audience was a major fact in the history of the language' (38). 'Of the language': not of the war, or of the nation, or of the European resurgence. All this is in *Poésie Raison ardente*, and it is remarkable that during and immediately after a momentous military conflict, a committed poet should have underscored with such insistence the pre-eminent role of words.

He even claims that the 'supreme question' is 'the *raison d'être* of human language' (63). What, indeed, *is* language? Why does it exist? The questions are so cavernous, and the replies that come spontaneously are, on the contrary, so obvious, that the matter is seldom raised. Yet it is worth staying for a while with Emmanuel's conviction that language is nothing less than the means by which a man makes himself, and that what is at stake is our conception of our kind and of its finality. According to 'The Risk of the Word', language is not an accessory, an instrument of which we happen to make use; or rather, one must distinguish between 'the faculty of speech', which is merely 'the noise peculiar to our species', and what he calls 'le dire', saying. Saying is the 'identity of speech and mind', though even this is not given: saying is more strictly 'the

contention of mind attempting to reveal itself in language' (204). But this process of revealing mind, of making oneself by saying oneself, has nothing to do with the vanity of self-expression, since language, 'the very being of man', is also the being 'of the world'. By 'naming and ordering' the world in words, we make it 'our dwelling-place'.[19] In language, in 'saying', the world becomes a world-for-us, and we become inhabitants-of-the-world.

Everyone, but the poet in particular, brings the world into the domain of 'saying'. It would be interesting to take literally the suggestion that the destiny of our species is an adventure in language, and to see history as the course which that adventure follows. One would then study history not, emphatically, as a branch of linguistics, but as the series of continually changing ways in which societies speak themselves and their relations to the world through the equally mobile languages in which they live.

Emmanuel's confidence in calling language the being of the world and of man, and his trust in the very words 'world' and 'man', derive clearly from his acceptance of the Christian understanding that everything is created and sustained by the Word of God, and that human language is related to the divine language. We have all been said by a word, which is still somehow inside us, and our own words are addressed to a world which has itself been, so to speak, worded. And when he claims, in *Versant de l'âge,* that 'the Word is born in the world with man' (17), I take him to mean that 'Adam' possesses language as part of his bearing of the divine image; that the word-ness of God is present in the world through men; and maybe that a world called into being by the divine Word responds to God in the words of humans. In such a perspective, the poet not only names the world: he also speaks in the name of the world, giving it a voice so as to re-present it to its Creator.

Poetry would even be (in a Romantic view) a repetition of divine creation. There is no question any longer of furthering God's creation of the world by continuing, like Him, to name it, as Adam seems to have done in the Genesis story, since between God, Adam and ourselves there is the gulf of the Fall. But (to return to *Poésie Raison ardente*), as God spoke in the beginning so as to make an order out of something 'without form and void', so the office of human language is to rise 'against chaos' (51), to master a universe which threatens to 'return to chaos' (56). An authentic poem is a new order, charged with considerable power and capable

of reorganising the world around itself, and also of renewing language, since against language too 'condemnation has been pronounced' (74). In Emmanuel's rather ambitious scheme, the task of poetry is to reverse the effects of the Fall, and the role of the poet becomes formidably dramatic, heroic, and even mythic.

I imagine that every poet, whatever his beliefs, whatever his scepticism about Christian cosmogony, knows something of this struggle with the formlessness, the chaos, of thoughts and words, and something also of the joy of discovering, in his work when finished, a small new cosmos however vulnerable. Maybe all poets also experience what looks like a contrary desire, to penetrate to origin, to enter a time before words. In another passage which modifies Mallarmé's poetics without naming it, Emmanuel writes: 'The poet, instinctively, abolishes the *object*, and returns the *thing* to its silence, which is the ancient respiration of the whole'; he restores matter 'to the primordial waters' (73–4). By this nostalgia for the silence which precedes words, this dream of a universal respiration as the divine Spirit 'moves upon the face of the waters' (when God, just prior to uttering the world, holds his Breath), the poet according to Emmanuel seeks to go back beyond the 'fault', beyond his own 'guilty nature', in a quest not for Eden but for what was before Eden, and before even the beginning of the world in light: a pure and absolute Beginning. He wants to be rid (as we saw in Eliot) of the 'oppression' of history, of that plethora of time and of world which is both the sign and the accumulation of wrath. He tries to annihilate language, which constitutes his being but which is nevertheless, like him, fallen, so as to hear silence. He searches for the darkness of origin, so as to cleanse things and the eyes which see them, and so that 'the first day of the universe' might shine again (76).

* * *

Such nostalgia is no doubt necessary. The flaming sword wielded by Cherubim and guarding the way to Eden (Genesis 3: 24) fascinates as well as repels, and the desire to efface the world in its entirety can be the extreme form of the aspiration to a new beginning. One might object, in the name of Christianity itself, that the world since the Fall does not exactly threaten to return to chaos, but has become, according to the Bible, vain and corrupt. Its healing depends, like that of men, not on the first day but on

the last, and its hope is not in a return to the creation but in the advent of its re-creation, its fiery transformation at the end of time into 'new heavens' and 'a new earth'. The course of poetry is consequently less retrospective than prospective. But Emmanuel knows this too, for he scatters his essays with an idea which I explored in my last book and which is, I believe, fundamental in every field: the idea of the possible.

It was during a war and while active as a Resistance fighter that he wrote: 'There is in our condition a metaphysical hiatus: we lack wholeness of being . . . We are not completed . . . but open on all sides to the possible, and as if impelled from within towards forms constantly evolving' (269). The possible is a rejoicing in the future which takes account of the Fall ('hiatus', 'lack'), and even depends on it. He will refer later, in a paradox which catches together the anguish that comes from the Fall and the hope that comes from Redemption, to 'the impossible – inexhaustible fountain of the possible' (*Versant de lâge*, p. 20). He recovers the paradoxal vision of St Paul, for whom wisdom, in a world out of joint, is to be sought in folly, and strength in weakness. I also note the word 'inexhaustible', which seems to suppose, beyond all impotence and aporia, the existence of a divine infinity. So poetry, like everything else, is oriented forwards. In the eyes of poetry, the real is not what is but what will be, and the role of poetic symbols is to 'maintain man in advance of himself' (41). Even before it achieves poetry, language is already a kind of prospection. It doesn't describe the actuality of things but explores their future; it even projects life or soul, according to Emmanuel, since he also writes of 'the continual animation of the future by language' (69).

How does this come about? First by the fact that 'every true image is a metamorphosis of matter' (90). True poetry disturbs the world, and alters the forms which it takes in our mind. But it does not fix these forms: on the contrary, it destabilises them, it keeps them perpetually mobile. The image in particular 'sets against linear succession, which is the weave of the everyday world, a simultaneous springing up of forms, a ceaseless metamorphosis, which foils appearance and maintains the world in suspension in the infinite possible' (46). Our habitation is neither the real as it is, nor the poem, but the virtual reality glimpsed in poetry.

It 'maintains the world in suspension in the infinite possible'. The expression refers specifically to the image, and even more narrowly to the kind of image created by modern writers, but I

should like to extend it, since I know no better description of *poetry*. And there is more. To hold that poetic writing subjects matter to metamorphosis could lead to lording it over the real, to practising that alchemy of the word from which Rimbaud had to disentangle himself with such consequences. But Emmanuel protects himself, and poetry, by demanding reciprocity between the transforming, possibilising, work of the poet and the resistances of the world, 'a constant exchange between image and perception' (274). Perception too is ours, but it is more constrained than the image, by what it meets. It surely educates the image, even while learning from it how to see things in a new light. Emmanuel was no doubt unaware that he was rediscovering the poetics of Coleridge, in the references to Wordsworth in chapters 4 and 14 of *Biographia Literaria*; he continues that poetics magnificently, by adding, with regard to image and perception, that it is 'their mutual ambiguity which stimulates creativity', and which maintains the possible itself 'in suspension'. The very fact, one might say, that our vision of things does not quite correspond and fails to impose itself, fosters poetry and furthers the possible.

Imagination is to be reintegrated 'within concrete existence' (187), without ceasing to be itself. One might add that we live, after all, in its domain, for language is already an imaginary world, where we see the tree which is not near our table, where we embrace a distant woman, where we pray to a God who hides Himself. Because language always adds itself, moreover, even in the simplest statement, to what it says, it functions rather like a work of art. As pencil strokes in a drawing are not mere signals to enable us to identify the object they represent, so language, far from being a code to decipher, is a figuration of the world, a version of the real. Poetry intervenes even more decisively. And it does not write *about* the world, it writes the world. Or as I said, I think more happily, in the original French version of this chapter: 'la poésie ne décrit pas le monde, elle l'écrit.' It neither describes the world 'objectively' nor scribes a world of its own; it is an act of writing, and not a transparent reproduction, but what it *writes* is the world. One certainly can use poetry, or any kind of writing, to draw things into words and so uproot them, but one can also ask of poetry that it show things in the light of its simple presence. It then resembles the line according to Paul Klee, which, rather than imitating the visible, 'makes visible'.

Matisse, said Reverdy, places one before Painting. Yes,

Emmanuel might have added, and his painting places one before the world. For art only separates from the world so as to return. The idea is powerfully expressed in the finest passage of *Poésie Raison ardente* dealing with the imagination. It is actually a quotation from the poet Jean Marcenac, but I think one values a writer in part for the quality of his quotations, and Emmanuel certainly make Marcenac's understanding his own. For Marcenac, 'dream and life endlessly exchange their prestige and their power, but what dream brings to life is still only life itself, as lived on this earth and in time . . . For the imagination only ever indicates the distance of man from himself; and insofar as man becomes himself, we journey towards the end of the imaginary' (185). It 'indicates the distance of man from himself': I seem to have been looking for years for this definition of the imagination. Imagination is less a stepping aside or a stepping outside than the necessary detour that we must make so as to arrive where we already are potentially. If mankind is no longer or not yet mankind, if the world is no longer and is not yet the world, the imagination is there to reveal our alienation and to help us to reduce it. Far from offering escape from the real, imagination leads us to the real, provided it is the real which draws us. The word 'tree' indicates the distance of the tree from itself; it is the sign of the exile, of the incompletion, of the world. But it also represents the real possibility of the tree. The word 'tree' is already a rustling other than that of the wind, and a beginning of hope; for a poet, to say 'the tree' is to see it trembling in all its leaves.

But for that to happen, one must consider a tree more important than poetry. Such an evaluation sounds improbable in Emmanuel, yet his grandiose vision of poetry is accompanied by a very clearsighted view of the temptation which poetry represents. He writes, in 'The Poet and Myth', that 'the real poet starts from the thing', and from the relations of the thing to its surroundings, and not from 'the lyric irradiation of the thing that he observes in himself' (78). There is considerable maturity in this refusal, in a writer only twenty-two years old, of the delights of introspection, of the prestige of the poetic 'I'; as there is also in the conviction that 'lyrical abandon, the psychological play of lights, shudders of fright before appearance', make it impossible to distinguish authentic relations with the world from the 'aberrations' of the imagination or the understanding (77–8). How, indeed, can one gauge the reality of what one imagines except by an effort of

attention which takes one out of oneself? And there is more than maturity in the honesty and lucidity which lead to this conclusion: 'if the real poet starts from the thing, *he does not appropriate it*, but remains in all humility outside it, not knowing what name to give it which will not separate him from the Whole'. Despite all his powers, the poet acknowledges, movingly, his impotence, and recognises, in the face of everything that Emmanuel writes elsewhere, the otherness of a whole which it would be hubristic to disturb. A 'stranger to the names' given by others, he becomes the one who cannot say by what names they should be replaced.

The greatest temptation is to substitute poetry for life, and in particular for religion, so as to make of it another means of access to the divine. One needs to note, on quitting a poetics which celebrates so generously the scope of human language and the force of poetry, that Emmanuel refuses to consider poetry as a way of salvation. He is prepared to call it a 'spiritual exercise' (39), but only on condition that one doesn't take 'a simple aesthetic emotion for a reflection of the ineffable', and that one doesn't confuse 'refined forms of evasion' with 'true contemplation' (12). We all, poets and readers of poetry, like to be charmed, enchanted; but one remembers that at the same moment, which was the moment of the war, and for the same reasons, an older poet was writing, in the course of a great poem, that 'the poetry does not matter'.

7

Tomlinson

'Our language is our land', says Tomlinson in 'Return to Hinton' (*A Peopled Landscape*). The perspective changes after Reverdy and Emmanuel, though it would be wrong to attribute the change only to the difference between English poetry and French. Nevertheless, it is the English language that Tomlinson tills, so that it should produce poems, and also so that it should be, not the place which we inhabit but the ground which sustains that inhabiting.

He also said, in a radio interview of 1984: 'People just don't look at things, do they?' Again the perspective shifts, because of the amount of looking that his poetry does, and of the stress that he lays on looking. The first line of the first poem in his *Collected Poems* runs: 'Wakening with the window over fields'. We talk of waking *to* the self, of discovering 'the real me'; here one wakes *from* the self, as if the self were less a private inwardness than a window for seeing. One finds oneself in Tomlinson's world not – or not fully, not really – by introspection but by attention, and the worth of the self depends on the quality of the looking.

The challenge to look seems simple enough: easy to meet or easy to disparage. We live in a time when the inadequacies of empiricism are often used as an excuse for abdicating a particular kind of responsibility: the kind which emphasises 'response'. So language is regarded as an infinite regress of self-signifying, and the world as a form of mental Plasticine, a pliant fiction which our interpretations produce and where there is nothing, consequently, to *understand*. In that light, Tomlinson's life of constant alertness, of forever becoming 'awake to what is there' (the phrase is from the same interview), is exemplary and in its way heroic.

For the looking is not simple, and though English in many ways, it does not part company with the French. The poem 'Their Voices Rang' (*The Flood*) remembers and recovers voices calling through winter trees and comments that, although they were speaking, 'it seemed they sang', and so made of the trunks 'a hall of victory'. As in Wordsworth, 'seemed' is not merely a concession to prosaic fact. The seeming song is like the poem itself; it is like poetry, which sings without being song, which is lyrical without the need

for a lyre, and which tunes the English language and the English ear. And the seeming pillars do transport the hearer through history, to Saxon warriors (I presume) or Medieval knights in their loud hall in the old ubiquitous woods. The calling transforms a natural place into an architectural space; again like poetry, which draws nature into art. Characteristically, Tomlinson asks what that can mean, so as to act out the interrogation through which poetry emerges, and so as to elucidate:

> And what is that and where?
> Though we come to it rarely,
> the sense of all that we might be
> conjures the place from air.

'All that we might be': the phrase takes one back again to Aristotle's assertion in chapter 9 of the *Poetics*, that 'the poet's function' (in Bywater's translation) 'is to describe, not the thing that has happened, but a kind of thing that might happen, i.e. what is possible as being probable or necessary'; but also towards more daring later versions of this, especially Sidney's in the *Apology*, where poetry becomes 'the divine consideration of what may be'. The virtue of art is to move from what is to what may or might be, and the art of Tomlinson the careful observer is not so far removed from that of the ambitious Sidney, without the 'divine'.

'Conjures' also surprises, and is perhaps meant to, with its echo of Baudelaire's more Romantic view of poetry as an 'evocative sorcery'. But one sees that the imagined place is not conjured out of *thin* air but from an air, as it were, arboreal and resoundable, and also that the word 'sense' marries two of its meanings (again as in Wordsworth), so that one's mental apprehension of the possible originates in a faculty of the body, in this case hearing. There follows a further question and answer:

> Is it the mind, then?
> It is the mind received,
> assumed into a season
> forestial in the absence of all leaves.

They locate the unwonted 'where' as a place that is both cerebral and seasoned, where the mind is entered by winter trees, and winter trees by a mind which could fill them with foliage.

Tomlinson's poetry, as everyone says, is a poetry of perceiving, but only someone with a strong and original imagination could perceive as he does. And is this so far from, say, Emmanuel? It is not exactly language that gives being to things in mind, yet a desired world nevertheless comes into being, and into the poem, through the reciprocations of mind and things and language. If British Empiricism speaks through his poetry, it does so with the subtlety and imaginative daring of which empiricism has in fact shown itself capable. Here, it has touched the word 'absence', plucking it from another French context: the Neoplatonic world of its use in Mallarmé, whose idea-flower is the one 'absent from all bouquets' (*Crise de vers*). 'Absent' is offered, first, to common sense (winter is a time when the absence of leaves need provoke no metaphysical *frisson*), and then to an imagination which, rather than conceiving ideal leaves absent from any tree, remembers forward to the leaves of spring and so makes them present.

'All that we might be': diligent readers of Tomlinson will recall the end of 'The Atlantic', in *Seeing is Believing*, where 'That which we were' is similarly confronted by 'all that we are not', and where the most surprising word, though it may not be entirely convincing, is again 'all'. One can also return to this passage in the 'Ode to Arnold Schoenberg', in *A Peopled Landscape*:

> Meshed in meaning
> by what is natural
> we are discontented
> for what is more,
> until the thread
> of an instrument pursue
> a more than common meaning.

That meaning should come from the natural and be a matter not of propositions or of absolutes but of human and non-human exchanges; that we should be meshed in meaning (and in alliteration) insofar as we are meshed in the neighbourhood of things: this is what one has learned to expect from his poetry. That we should be 'discontented' for what is more comes as something of a surprise. Yet the poem carefully avoids the 'supernatural', and very carefully avoids saying even the 'more than natural'. Far from beating at the doors of transfiguration, it allows the new line's 'until' to announce the assuagement of discontent, by the supervention of

art, and at the moment when one of the arts is itself being renewed. In 'Their Voices Rang', human voices suggestive of music might clothe winter trees in foliage; here, a 'wintered tree' filling space 'with verdure' is the metaphor of sound revived and made 'reintelligible' by the twelve-tone system. The effect of Schoenberg's violin concerto is to bring 'possibility' to 'certainty', by remaking sound in the manner of a god producing the 'fiat' and the 'word' of a new 'creating'. The vocabulary of Genesis is recycled, yet the poem does not devise, as in Sidney, 'another nature', and the meaning pursued by the violin is 'more' not 'other' than common. The Viennese new music is entered, in Tomlinson's poem, by the bell-clang and cockcrow of an English shire. On the other hand, the poem is an 'Ode' – it refers to itself as a poem – and it is within the scope of the poem, and at a second artistic remove, that the sound of music plays on the visible world.

Tomlinson's poetry looks, and it wants more. But the more which it imagines, the possible which it procures, by means of art, is no more other-worldly that the spring which, however remote, will follow winter. Not that this implies a tight control of his world. He welcomes chance, for instance, and the use in his graphics of decalcomania and other initially aleatory techniques may have made his writing more open to promptings from outside. One sees even that a certain practice of Surrealism can actually be a way of *not* indulging the self, of deferring to what is beyond the will: that there is, as it were, a Tomlinsonian perspective on to Surrealism quite different from Breton's own. Typically, however, as I pointed out in an earlier discussion of his work (a chapter in *Poetry and Possibility*), he is interested less in the invisible than in the unseen: less in the possibilities suggested by reaches of being beyond appearance than in the kind of suggestiveness to be found in what is certainly there but remains, for routine physical reasons, out of sight. A similar distinction is observable in 'The Faring' (*The Shaft*). During a gale in a valley, when a house seems to ride like a ship and the planet's travelling through space to make itself manifest, gulls over the land bring an awareness of the sea and of the immeasurable sky: they 'rhymed here with elsewhere'. The word 'rhymed' itself rhymes Tomlinson's poetics to his ontology. There is no yearning in his poetry, or if there is, it is a very classical yearning that all things should harmonise. 'Civil' is another recurring word, like 'civic', and he uses it with the meaning which makes 'civil war' an oxymoron. So the 'elsewhere' is not the

beyond; it is, simply, somewhere else; though here too the real other places of sea and sky possess, through being absent and unseen and merely hinted, their own mysteriousness. His writing does continue the oldest and most elemental pursuit of poetry, the search, through the sense of mystery, of awe, for a human way of being in a world other than human.

The invisible, the unseen; the beyond, the elsewhere. And one can now, I think, reach down to the underlying distinction, which enables one to understand the constant relation of Tomlinson's poetry to the world, and which gathers much of what I have been trying to grasp over these last few chapters: the distinction between the imaginary and the imagined.

* * *

The imagined comes, for a poet, in language, and in working the land of English Tomlinson has set up further 'relations' among 'contraries'. English has always been, of course, many languages. It is the meeting of the two great European tongues, the Latin and the Germanic; the place where they can exchange their skills and sound together. It is the co-existence of a congeries of dialects from all over the islands. And there are now more Englishes than ever, scattered, disquietingly, across the globe. In his 'own' poems and in his translations, Tomlinson has rhymed a particularly rich English with Italian, Spanish, French, Russian, and he has negotiated especially with the poetry of our most familiar other, with American. In volume after volume he has crossed and recrossed the Atlantic, and this engagement with American is of historical interest.

His 'English' poems are quickly recognisable. Some are based on a four-stress line, which is less, it seems, a recovery of Anglo-Saxon measure than a formal miming of natural alert speech, or even on the iambic pentameter, that unkillable survivor. Septenaries are present. The poems may include rhyming or half-rhyming. Their lines are sometimes alternately indented, and carry a visual suggestion of the couplet. Their syntax can be highly elaborate, and I sense that this is probably more important, and that Tomlinson's syntax is what makes his poems, linguistically, what they are. One thing that can certainly be said of it is that, in the poetry of our century, Tomlinson's enacts the revenge of hypotaxis. Other poems, as is well known, have an American appearance

and movement, with a great deal of work being done at the ends and beginnings of lines.

There are not quite, however, two distinct types of poem. Those that are English in metre or theme may have an American beat, and clean surface. American short-line poems frequently advance through roving rhymes and assonances; they may reach for an old-world phrasing, as does 'Crow' in *A Peopled Landscape*:

> The inspecting eye
> shows cold
> amid the head's
> disquieted iridescence.

Even the triplets of many poems in that volume, learnt from William Carlos Williams, have a rhythm which is English. Rather than failing to imitate Williams's breathings and hesitations, Tomlinson calls on native iambs and the trochees into which they reverse, and even on the full cadence of the pentameter, so as to play innovatively, and as an English writer, across the American pattern:

> He [a fisherman] knows his net
> but knowledge
> must reassess its ground
> to comprehend
> the mystery of fact
> supple in sunlight
> teeming from the sound.
> ('Maillol')

Tomlinson is his own master in the poems he makes: he changes what he finds, and uses various American lessons for English ends. This involves nothing as banal as getting the best of both worlds, old and new. It is a matter, rather, of plying our two traditions, as Americans have done in the past but as we have hardly felt the need to do, before now. And here also one sees the customary to-and-fro of his practice. From the beginning he has worked the English language, venturing for a new clarity in vocabulary, syntax, sound, and especially in the craft of the line, and yet one also encounters in his poetry a kind of deferring to the historical English which already exists, an unwillingness to

misappropriate, a gratitude, as it were, for one's language as muse. His attentiveness to the quiddity of language can even surprise. When he discusses his exploration of other poets, he can seem to ignore so much that is not astringently linguistic. According to *Some Americans*, what he discovered as a youngster in Pound's Canto 2, for instance:

> Lithe turning of water,
> sinews of Poseidon,
> Black azure and hyaline,
> glass wave over Tyro

was a 'cleanliness in the phrasing' (page 2). There is no recorded response, as such, to Poseidon and his sinews, but then this may be a sign of maturity: that he should have focused on exactness of technique, and emulated that, rather than trying to mimic the poetry's imaginative power. That kind of power comes of its own, or doesn't, and what one requires for it is a language. Similarly, in the public reading of his own poems he concentrates on a clear articulating of their way of saying, and it is out of that purity of attention that there comes the verse's really quite seductive song.

It is the same, in fact, with his relation to other poets. He has felt himself swimming against the tide of the poetry being written around him, but finding a way to his own poetry has also involved finding his own way into traditions of poetry already there. Such a route to originality is perhaps more difficult, and certainly less newsworthy, than overt experimentation. It enables his reader also to enter English poetry from new perspectives. A major poet, capable of absorbing and transmuting a wide variety of influences, Tomlinson causes English poetry to speak anew in his verse; one meets any number of older poets in a new guise and in different company. What is there has once more been given its due, and one sees that when this occurs, the other becomes part of one's own strength.

Similarly, his language negotiates between the resistance of the other and the claims of the mind, between things out there and our ability to transform them, and this clarifies something else that I have been trying to set down. His poetry *is* poetry in that it offers the pleasure of periphrasis. Most readers of poetry actually have a theoretical prejudice against periphrasis, as a failure to speak directly and concisely, and yet in practice are we not forever

delighting in circumlocutory expressions which we don't necessarily recognise as such? Keats adds pleonasm to periphrasis, insult to injury, by calling his nightingale – or rather, calling *to* her – 'thou, light-wingèd Dryad of the trees'; and yet no one objects, as far as I know, that a nightingale is not a dryad and that 'of the trees' is already part of the definition of 'dryad'. So in Tomlinson, music is 'a body one cannot see' ('For Miriam', *The Flood*), and mushrooms, at the end of a poem about an almost magical quest, are 'stepping stones across a grass of water' ('Mushrooms', *The Shaft*). The word in his verse rejoices in its sway over the world. But his poetry also offers the pleasure of extreme precision, of rightness, as if a perfect language were simply waiting to be learnt and applied. Take these lines on reflections:

> Like liquid shadows. The ice is thin
> Whose mirror smears them as it intercepts
> Withdrawing colours; and where the crust,
> As if a skin livid with tautening scars,
> Whitens, cracks . . .
> ('Reflections', *Seeing is Believing*)

(One should also listen to the sounds.) Or these, on city shadows:

> . . . the leaning, black
> Enjambements like ladders for assault
> Scale the façades and tie them to the earth,
> Confounding fire-escapes already meshed
> In slatted ambiguities.
> ('All Afternoon', *Notes from New York*)

At such moments, word and world rejoice together.

It comes, I think, to this: Poetry is the art of not calling a spade a spade. It is equally the art of finding, for a spade, the exact and only word, or combination of words. And like all real poets, Tomlinson shows that the two arts, of naming accurately and naming anew, and the two desires from which they derive, only appear to be contradictory.

8

Not I

Over the last few chapters I have been mainly concerned with the perplexed relation between writing and reality. It is time now to confront a question which has been present from the beginning and which I began to raise explicitly in the fourth chapter, in connection with Hopkins: the question of the self, of the 'I'.

What is a self, for us now? The view which has been gaining ground and gathering consistence is familiar, complex, and interesting. It argues, often though not always under the aegis of Marx, that we are the products of society and of history, that 'I' am the subject of ideological and other influences which arrive from far beyond me. It follows Freud in denying the primacy of consciousness; in removing consciousness from its own meaning, through its dependence on the unconscious; and in seeing the 'I' as a prey to conflicting masters. Lacan's reading of Freud destabilises the self still further. The *moi* is a false wholeness, imaginary, and perpetually invented so as to conceal one's radical lack and incompleteness; while the *sujet* is perpetually restructured in terms of signifiers, with which it stands in a relation of interdependence. In the wake of Saussure, language becomes a self-sufficient system, a structure of formal differences, an autonomy which ignores the speaker and cannot have the subject as source. The subject constructs itself in each act of speaking, but is also itself constructed by the language in which it intervenes.

The self is the object of sociological, psychoanalytic, and linguistic suspicion.

The 'individual' can no longer rely on etymology to save him from being divided. A man's 'identity' no longer furnishes him with the quality of being *idem*, the same, or with the faculty of repeating himself *identidem*, over and over. A 'person' looks more like the mask which the word originally denoted. A 'private' man is less withdrawn than deprived, or even bereaved.

To accept such a view, however long it has been with us, and however commonplace it has become in the realms of discourse, is nevertheless not without consequence. It is to forgo the substantial unity of the soul, as Eliot did, quietly, seventy years ago (in

'Tradition and the Individual Talent', that still contemporary essay which claims not to trespass on metaphysics). It is to agree that one derives from contingence, that one does not possess oneself, that one is indefinitely displaced. 'I' am not my own presence; 'I' am not the voice of one. It is also to abandon the idea of a 'world', of a self-existing external reality similarly equipped with its own unchanging truth and unity. And what is perhaps more, it is to allow what Foucault calls 'the disappearance of subjectivity in the withdrawal of origin'.[20]

One needs to note (and this, for some reason, is less of a commonplace) that these various discourses have not actually *proved* anything about the self, and its relation to the other. They have not shown that there is no intrinsic human nature, for instance, surviving through history, family romances, ready-made language systems, and through our dogged fantasies of self; nor confuted the view, which held good from Plato to Kant, that the search for righteousness involves bringing one's actions into harmony with larger realities beyond one. Indeed, such discourses cannot be 'right': by their own insistence, what they advance are not the expressive and representational truths of a stable 'I' confronting a stable world. They are re-descriptions, new ways of putting it, new vocabularies which are more satisfactory to their users than the old, not because they mesh more closely with reality but because they work better.

They are also open to being historicised, no less than the discourse about the individual and reality which they seek to replace. On their own showing, with the exception, I suppose, of structural linguistics, they too must derive from passing historical contingencies, and no doubt in the future they will come to have a quaint air about them of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Above all, they are not neutral. The more one 'unpacks' them, turning on them their own hermeneutics of suspicion (Ricoeur), the more they appear as strategies of denial. What was Freud avoiding, for example, in his paper 'On Narcissism', when he reduced conscience to an ego ideal of adults unwilling to forgo 'the narcissistic perfection of . . . childhood'?[21] What is the name, in the morality which Nietzsche wished to supplant, for his project of self-creation, of 're-creating all "it was" into a "thus I willed it" '? What is the relation to the other implied in this statement of Richard Rorty's: 'By seeing every human being as consciously or unconsciously acting out an idiosyncratic fantasy, we can see the

distinctively human, as opposed to animal, portion of each human life as the use of every particular person, object, situation, event and word encountered in later life for symbolic purposes'?[22] All of these discourses, including that of linguistics, refuse an authoritative word, and all are intent on ridding the world of God.

As one reads them one sees that they are indeed describing a world without God. In a Christian perspective, and remembering that the Bible also operates a hermeneutics of suspicion, they are messages from a fallen world, in part colluding with that world, in part seeking to overcome it. All discourse is collusive, since no prolonged intention and no length of language escapes the gravity of the Fall. Does this mean that, to understand the self in a world where God does exist, one needs to reinstate everything they reject? Some, I know, would reply with an indignant affirmative, and I continue to be haunted by the possibility that they are right – right at least in practice, to ignore the noises of the world. Yet contemporary discourses of the self reveal, first, that the view of the self in so-called Christian thought since the Renaissance is itself corrupt, worldly. (No doubt Medieval views of self were worldly in other ways.) What has the Cartesian 'I', what has the sovereign subject of liberal and Christian humanism, with his 'rights', his self-development, his liberty to follow the paths of reason – what have these to do with the Christian sinner and child of God? To develop a Christian sense of the self is emphatically not to endorse the bourgeois individual, who *is* the product of history and, a Christian must surely add, of antagonistic spiritual forces which have an interest in history, and in baptising as Christian movements of the mind which are themselves antagonistic.

I note, incidentally, that this post-Renaissance 'self' and the modern 'de-centred subject' which views it with such disdain, have one thing in common, something so deep-laid, in fact, as to suggest an underlying continuity. The project of self-making, in Nietzsche and also in Freud and in those influenced by them, rejoins older desires to make of the self a work of art, to cultivate self, to exploit the resources of the ego-sphere.

Our discourses on self restate, moreover, in a different key, part of what I understand the Bible to be saying. They seem to me closer, in fact, to a Christian view, despite their untroubled atheism; though I am aware that we are all the children of time and that my saining of them may be thoroughly misguided. They don't talk about sin, but what they are talking about is the effects of sin. It is

because of sin, for a Christian, that the 'I' is not in touch with its origin; that the self, or one's sense of self, is largely or wholly a fantasy that one projects for purposes of defence or gratification; that language is not the site of presence. What one might demur about in the most extreme revisionary accounts of the self is not that they destroy so much cherished illusion but that they are, in comparison with the fierceness of the Bible, rather tepid. If one is really looking for a radical deconstruction of self, glance at the New Testament.

The writings of St Paul, especially as they engage with his own self, have more charge in them than those of any modern I know. (This includes Beckett, who might have been central to this chapter but for the fact that I realise I am not ready for him.) As I suggested at the end of *Towards a Christian Poetics*, Paul, or Saul as he was at the time, was obliged to see, to define, and to reject an imaginary 'I' which had been provided for him by his culture. It was the image of a perfect Hebrew, armoured by birth and ritual, a member of a severe sect, a blameless observer of divine law (see Philippians 3: 4-6). This frozen, worldly identity served to justify him in his own eyes and so alienate him from possibility, from the awareness both of sin and of forgiveness, of vanity and of re-creation. An important passage in Faucault comes to mind, about the polysemy of the word *subject*. The 'I' as a grammatical subject can be subject in another way: to someone else, 'by control and dependence', and also, more insidiously, to its own sense of identity. In both cases there is power and subjugation.[23] One of the lessons which our period is particularly able to teach is that we are forever alienating ourselves through the signifiers we choose, or have imposed on us. Metaphors are especially hazardous, while they still have the prestige of buzz-words. And those which emerge from the very discourse about the power of signifiers are themselves not always without harm. Structuralists describe the self as 'text' or 'code', as in this passage from Barthes: 'This "I" which approaches the text is already itself a plurality of other texts, of codes which are infinite or, more precisely, lost (whose origin is lost)'.[24] The major realisation that the self is a reader written by its reading, and that, in the making of many books, there is no original entry point through which one might exit into a kind of whiteness of selfhood, can easily monopolise attention for a vocabulary which is, after all, technical and reductive. In the Existentialists' self as 'project' one was at least thrown forward.

Religious language is potentially the most profoundly alienating. A word like 'Jew' applied to the self can, as Saul found, isolate one from God. In any particular case, the word 'Christian' can serve the same function.

I am not unaware either that the discourse of 'sin' and 'forgiveness' will be just another entrapment and arrest of possibility for anyone who does not see himself as a sinner in need of forgiveness.

The self of Saul also reminds one of what is sharp and unpalatable in Freud's analysis of narcissism, an analysis which I would not wish to depreciate. 'This ideal ego', he writes, this image, created by the 'conscience', of what one aspires to be, 'is now the target of the self-love which was enjoyed in childhood by the actual ego' (ibid.). The motive for striving to satisfy 'the admonitions of others' and one's own 'critical judgement' may be nothing more that the love of self: this could be La Rochefoucauld writing, and it does seem that in one way Freud was continuing the work of the French *moralistes*. Observing the Law can be a process by which one observes oneself observing the Law, as it presumably was for Saul, and no doubt for those Pharisees described by Jesus as 'hypocrites', and also for unspiritual 'Puritans'. Conscience can be a powerful enhancer both of self-regard and of self-regarding. Taking one's actions seriously, through scruple and by discipline, can easily slip into taking oneself seriously. And the 'ideal ego' has, I believe, a particular application for Christians. When Freud suggests that what a man 'projects before him as his ideal' is 'the substitute for the lost narcissism of his childhood in which he was his own ideal', one needs to add that the name for this ideal can be 'Jesus'. Freud's insights do away neither with the true claims of Law nor with the Son of God; neither with self-effacing obedience nor with self-forgetting love; but they do reveal with a new acuteness how easily, to quote from Eliot's *Ash-Wednesday*, we 'mock ourselves with falsehood'. In the ambiguity of our human condition, we may need to be saved from our 'conscience', and we may need Jesus to save us from 'Jesus'. Psychoanalysis is powerfully heuristic, and the reason for this is that it is the discourse of the fallen self.

The vocabulary which St Paul developed for describing his condition, and any man's condition, without God, was considerably simpler, but as extreme as one could wish. It comes down to being dead: 'when we were dead in sins' (Ephesians 2: 5), 'you . . . who were dead in trespasses and sins' (2: 1), 'you, being dead in your

sins' (Colossians 2: 13). 'Dead' here is not a metaphor: for Paul, physical death is what is figurative. Should one believe him, it is not surprising that, as R. D. Laing reports in *The Divided Self*, some schizophrenics should feel that they are not really alive.[25] Should one take seriously the existence and malignity of devils, it is not surprising that so many should be paranoic. This is not to suggest that this kind of folly is wisdom, but that (like ugliness for Victor Hugo in comparison with beauty) it opens on to truths of which everyday soundness of mind may be ignorant. I realise that one could reverse the argument, and diagnose St Paul.

Or take his description of himself at one point in 1 Corinthians 13, that chapter on 'charity' which we all like to admire. What, according to St Paul, is a man without love? He is 'nothing' (verse 2): 'I am', he writes, 'nothing'. The order of words in the Greek, *outhen eimi*, as in the Latin translation, *nihil sum*, is suggestive: (it is as a) nothing (that I) am.

Take also, as the most radical expression of the divided, the displaced, self, his description in the seventh chapter of Romans of his later encounter with the law of the Old Testament. Through the law, he writes, sin sprang to life, and for many verses one could assume that he is personifying sin for purposes of dramatisation: 'sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence' (v.8); 'sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me' (v.11); 'sin . . . working death in me . . .' (v.13). One then comes, however, to this: 'if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me' (v.20). The 'I' associated with self-awareness and intention is, as it were, unhoused, and obliged to observe a strange power which has replaced it as a terrifyingly novel form of inwardness.

There, in the Christian perspective, is the deeper understanding of the de-centred subject. And when St Paul speaks of alienation, it is likewise at a wholly other level. The Gentiles' wits are darkened, he tells the Ephesians, because they are 'alienated from the life of God' (4: 18).

It is not a question, one sees, of believing or not believing in the existence of God. All the signs are that Saul believed with perfect conviction; as for the Gentiles, their problem was not that they believed in the wrong gods and so were estranged from belief in the one true God, but that they were strangers to his 'life'. And what is even more startling is that redemption for Paul is not in

any simple sense a restoration of the 'I'. It is, of course, a move from death to life: in the previous chapter of Romans he has told his readers that they should behave 'as those that are alive from the dead' (6: 13). Yet the old 'I' is still dead. Having written to the Colossians, for instance, that they are 'risen with Christ' (3: 1), he also says to them, point-blank: 'you died; and now your life lies hidden with Christ in God' (v.3, *NEB*). So Paul is still 'not I', and when he describes his 'life' it is like this: 'I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me' (Galatians 2: 20). *Ouketi ego*, 'no longer I': it is exactly the expression he used to describe his ousting by sin.

His terminology is far out, and it suggests two further thoughts. The usual condition of the fallen self (estrangement from God, willingness for sin, death, nothingness) is hardly sanity. Laing writes, again in *The Divided Self*, of 'our present pervasive madness that we call normality' (11), and suggests in particular that 'our "normal" "adjusted" state is too often the abdication of ecstasy' (12). It is the state, perhaps, of Michal the wife of King David, who despised him for leaping and dancing before the Lord (2 Samuel, 6: 16). The 'cure' which Paul proposes is likewise far removed from the modern cure of, say, recognising the health of one's instincts, and goes beyond such perceptions as 'the ego has to be developed' (Freud, p.77), or 'existence precedes essence' (Sartre, *passim*). It involves an etymological ecstasy of the 'I', in which the 'I' which I am and am not is, quite simply, someone else.

* * *

It is partly a matter of narrative. If we mock ourselves with falsehood by covering our nakedness with signifiers, we also do so, most efficiently, by entertaining ourselves with tales. 'One's self-identity', Laing writes in a later work, *Self and Others*, 'is the story one tells one's self of who one is'.[26] Presumably we can never get beyond tale-telling, so that the 'I' will always be the subject of a narration. And, according to Laing, there is worse: 'One's need to believe this story often seems to be one's desire to discount another story, that is more primitive and more terrible'. I argued in *Towards a Christian Poetics* that there is no story in Eden, and that only after the Fall is story needed, with its power to invent, to hypothesise, to create another world governed by coherence and teleology. Its danger is that, rather than seeking to remake the real, it may

provide the fantasy by which we avoid the real. As far as our stories-of-self are concerned, one sees in the Gospels that Jesus, the great story-teller, sometimes counters the stories of his interlocutors. To give a particularly primitive and terrible example: the Jews tell Jesus what was presumably one of their most inveterate stories about themselves: 'Abraham is our father' (John 8: 39), and then, under pressure from him, they tell their most treasured story of all: 'we have one Father, even God' (v.41). Were they who they think they are, these stories would be true; but Jesus finally reveals *his* story about them: 'Ye are of your father the devil' (v.44).

We cannot entirely escape from our own story, but one Old Testament story recounts how the effort is made. It is delicate, intricate, and complete beyond anything one could have imagined. In the eleventh chapter of 2 Samuel, David sees Bathsheba bathing, has her brought to the palace, and seduces her. He later orders the captain of his army to place Bathsheba's husband in the front line and to make sure that he is killed by the enemy. We do not know how David tells this story to himself; as it is told to us, it is the story of an expense of spirit in a waste of shame. God's response (chapter 12) is to send the prophet Nathan to tell David another story. In the same city there was a rich man and a poor man. The rich man had many flocks and herds, while the poor man had only a single ewe lamb, which he loved like a daughter. As a feast for a visitor, the rich man served him the poor man's lamb. David understands the story, ethically, and declares angrily that the rich man deserves to die. We have to feel superior to him here, for we see that he has mistaken a parable for a factual report, a piece of realism for a portion of reality, and above all that he has failed to recognise the story of himself. Nathan spares him a lesson in New Criticism but, having explained the story, he declares the punishments which God has decided, and they are terrible in the extreme.

He does not, however, have the last word, if the attribution to David of Psalm 51 and its relation to this incident are correct. There is one word in the psalm against which one cries out, and which I do not pretend to understand: 'Against thee', says David, 'thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight' (v.4). That murder and adultery are sins against God is central to the Old Testament's teaching; but how can they be sins *only* against God? Do Uriah and Bathsheba not count? Have they not been offended? The only way I can begin to explain this is to think that, in a psalm

which must be the most famous confession of sin in the Bible, the 'I' will not tell its story, will not pour out, and pore over, its own salacious, violent, exciting narrative. 'Thee only' is a flight from story, to the extent that any speaking or writing can be. It directs the attention of the penitent 'I' away from telling tales, towards the watchfulness of Being itself.

The story does not end here, however, and nor does the involvement of sin with what we call literature. Towards the end of the psalm David prays, in words whose meaning is obscured by their position in the liturgy: 'O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise'. It is as if the most radical confession – which goes down underneath even fornication, plotting, killing, to: 'I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me' – is also the necessary prior condition for poetry, or for the kind of poetry intent on 'thy praise'. 'Praise' is necessarily preceded by 'blame', by self-blame. The movement is outward, from 'a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart' to 'singing aloud' of the righteousness of God, and to prayer for the good of Zion and for the building of the walls of Jerusalem.

David is already of course in the process of writing a poem. He is already telling a story. But it is the story of his repentance. It cannot avoid narrative entirely; it cannot avoid, in its expression of spiritual pain, the necessity for linguistic, for poetic, pleasure. It can only be as honest as possible, and have as its end a position outside the 'I'.

In terms of story, even David does not have the last word. To replace the child of their adultery, who dies, David and Bathsheba, now married, have another son, who is Solomon.

* * *

It is also a question of the relation between the 'I' and the other. Contemporary discourses of the self identify various unhappy relations, and one especially. In the scheme of the *Cogito*, according to Heidegger, the subject looks out on an objective world, places itself on the scene of the world, and disposes of what it surveys.[27] The world is my object. There is then a corresponding investing of the subject with fascinating reaches of inwardness. This latter is often placed further back in time and laid at the door of Christianity, particularly by sociologists and literary critics. A commonplace has taken root according to which, while the Greeks were concerned

with reality and with an art of living, the Christian religion spurns reality in favour of an afterworld and concentrates its energies into an art of the self. Ian Watt informs us of the 'individualist and subjective emphasis of primitive Christianity', and decides that 'Christianity in general . . . was essentially an inward, individualist, and self-conscious kind of religion'. Calvin was responsible, in the sixteenth century, for re-establishing and systematising 'this earlier pattern of purposive spiritual introspection', and for bequeathing it to his Puritan followers as 'the supreme religious ritual for the layman as well as for the priest'.[28] This does indeed seem to be 'generally agreed' (ibid.), and a quite different critic like Gabriel Josipovici is squarely with Watt in imagining that the 'one important question that the Calvinist must ask himself is always: "Am I one of the elect or one of the damned?" '.[29] Perhaps they are right, but this in no way corresponds to my understanding of Calvinism, let alone of the primitive Christianity of the New Testament. How have such critics read Calvin's *Institutes*, say, or his *Brève instruction chrétienne*; the *Westminster Confession*; Richard Baxter's *The Saint's Everlasting Rest*? A glance through chapter headings alone suggests a religion massively turned away from the self, fundamentally concerned for the nature and the activity of God. It is the absence of such concern which accounts for the 'Puritan' sickness of a character like Richardson's Clarissa. This is not the place to argue the matter, but I do suggest in passing that a second look at Puritanism would change our understanding of many things.

It is, in any case, the New Testament perspective that concerns me. Something like inwardness is of course present, and is called 'the heart'. 'From within', says Jesus in Mark 7: 21, 'out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications . . .', and there follows a list unflatteringly long. Correspondingly, a good man 'out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things' (Matthew 12: 35). It is also true that, famously, Jesus internalises disobedience to the Law: 'Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart' (Matthew 5: 27–8). One would like to be able to dissipate the greater exigency of this moral realism by calling it 'subjective'. It certainly does not imply a continually self-absorbed inspection of motive. Consider occasions when St Paul seems to conform to the popular image of the Puritan. 'Examine yourselves', he urges his readers in 2

Corinthians 13: 5, 'whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves'. One can ask oneself if one is 'living the life of faith' (to take the New English Bible translation) without obsession, and one can 'put oneself to the test' without spending all one's time on it. More decisively, Paul continues: 'Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you?' He enters a quite other dimension of self-knowledge, where introspection is also a kind of extraspection, and where, if the translators of the New English Bible are right, it also involves an interpersonal awareness of the Christian community: 'Surely you recognise that Jesus Christ is among you?' There is the same vertiginous leap from the self to God in his similar plea to the Philippians, when he moves from: 'work out your own salvation with fear and trembling', to: 'For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure' (2: 12–13).

Properly to look inward is to look outward; it is to increase one's sense of the greatest Outward of all. And are not the Beatitudes (Matthew 5: 3–11) a lesson in outwardness? As a list they recall the Ten Commandments, but they are not simply a series of positives ('Blessed are they that . . .') replying to a series of negatives ('Thou shalt not . . .'). They remind one that Christianity is about how a person is; it is not, at its deepest, a matter of obedience to law. One is blessed in what one is, and one *is* in how one relates to the other. This is clear with the meek, the merciful, the peacemakers, with those who are 'persecuted for righteousness' sake'. It is true also of those who are 'poor in spirit', or who, according to the New English Bible, 'know their need of God'. Their poverty is indeed a function of their relation to God, as in Psalm 51, which I considered earlier: 'The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise' (v.17), or in Isaiah: 'to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word' (66: 2). It is true also of those who 'hunger and thirst after righteousness', where one meaning at least is that they wish 'to see right prevail' (*NEB*). And it is true of those who mourn and of the pure in heart, when one realises that their blessedness is respectively to be 'comforted' and, of all things, to 'see God'. All the blessings, in fact, come from outside and may take one outside, prodigiously: 'their's is the kingdom of heaven', 'they shall inherit the earth', 'they shall be called the children of God'.

(St Luke includes a selection of the Beatitudes in chapter 6 of

his gospel, and seems to focus on literal poverty, hunger, and weeping, in a kind of social and creaturely realism. His interpretation is not relevant here; it is certainly not concerned with subjectivity.)

Yet it is another of Jesus' remarks, made in connection, it is true, with a public activity enjoined by the law, which is his most startling statement about self-scrutiny and self-knowledge. 'When thou doest alms', he says in Matthew 6: 3, 'let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth'. The well known words amount to an injunction against introspection, in favour of a self-forgetting which is a kind of self-ignorance. They call to mind humility, that state which one cannot attain and know it; and for the writer they recall eloquence, which also occurs, if at all, when one is attentive to something else.

Looking outward is surely the ethic of the New Testament, as of the Old. Christianity is the religion of the other ('love thy neighbour', 'love one another', 'love your enemies'), and of the Other ('thou shalt love the Lord thy God'). It pulls one away from self to the knowledge of God in Christ. The West says: 'Know thyself'. The New Testament says, through St Paul: 'I have suffered the loss of all things . . . That I may know him' (Philippians 3: 8–10). Let 'unselfconscious' mean conscious of the unself.

The 'I' has to be dealt with; but for this to occur it must, in one way or another, exist. Radical political theory may suggest, uncomfortably, that the 'I' depends more than we find welcome on social relations, but it needs a consciousness to raise and, at the least, a 'dividual' to socialise. In its deconstruction of the *Cogito*, psychoanalysis removes the 'I' from its position as origin, and disallows it immediate knowledge of its own nature, but without denying its existence. To quote Ricoeur again, 'I am, but what am I, I who am?'; or to put it the other way round, '*What* I am is as problematical as *that* I am is apodictic', or incontrovertible.[30] According to structural linguistics, 'I' is an empty sign in *langue*, or language as system, where it is defined only by its difference from 'you'; but in *parole*, in any particular act of speech, 'I' is surely appropriated by a subject and acquires semantic, referential value. At least, that is what we find difficult to deny in practice. However we 'suspect' the *I*, we act as if it exists, perhaps because we cannot avoid doing so. The theorist indignantly belabouring a critic, or some poor poet, for naïvely perpetuating the myth of a solid *I* facing an equally solid world 'out there' and reacting to it with his

own individual thoughts, will himself be all too solidly there in his indignant and arm-waving individuality. We have the same problem with meaning. However radically we refuse the very notion of meaning, we aim for it in everything we write. It is a nice dilemma, described perfectly by Paul de Man in *Allegories of Reading*: 'the pressure towards meaning and the pressure towards its undoing can never cancel each other out' (161). It is the same with truth. No amount of finesse can prevent us, when we are presented with a statement, from agreeing or disagreeing, or reserving judgement, and the latest epigone of Derrida will be happy to say, apropos of the latest idea of Derrida's, that he is right. Should we take Nietzsche's metaphor of truth as a 'mobile army of metaphors' as literally true? And what, to return to the 'I', of intention? We may feel superior about authorial intention especially, yet we keep wondering what the writer meant.

Wordsworth writes in *The Prelude*: 'Points have we all of us within our souls / Where all stand single' (Book Third, ll.188–9). We know how to historicise this; we can place 'souls', 'within', even 'we', in their cultural matrix; but does anyone dare say otherwise? He continues: 'is not each a memory to himself?' (l.191). Even a believer, like Rorty, in the contingency of selfhood, would allow that these particular memories do happen to constitute the 'I' that I now am. Hopkins writes, at the beginning of his notes on Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*, of 'my selfbeing, my consciousness and feeling of myself, that taste of myself, of *I* and *me* above and in all things, which is more distinctive than the taste of ale or alum, more distinctive than the smell of walnutleaf or camphor'. Is this rather too self-aware, somewhat indulgent in the use of rhythm and alliteration? Laing, having quoted the passage in *Self and Others* (35), quotes another one even more familiar:

> I am gall, I am heartburn. God's most deep decree
> Bitter would have me taste: my taste was me;
> Bones built in me, flesh filled, blood brimmed the curse.
>
> Selfyeast of spirit a dull dough sours.

The problem is, indeed, not *that* I am but *what* I am, and although Laing's fine comment here is not strictly relevant to my argument, I shall quote it. 'Thousands of people have come to psychiatrists', he writes, 'to be "cured" of less than this. And after the courses of

electric shocks, thousands have felt "better" ' (36).

There is, presumably, no self available to the consciousness which is not, to a greater or less extent, imaginary, created in part from embellishments, exclusions, and blindnesses. So it might be something of a relief to find St Peter writing about 'the hidden man of the heart', *ho kruptos tēs kardias* (1 Peter 3:4). The context is strangely specific for such a large idea: let the adornment of Christian women, he says, not be the 'outward' adornment of coiffure, jewellery, apparel, but the incorruptible adornment of a meek and quiet spirit. One expects him to call this latter adornment 'inward', in the manner of St Paul, who habitually contrasts the 'outward' man to the 'inward' (for example 2 Corinthians 4: 16). To call it 'hidden' certainly chimes with Jesus' command to do one's alms 'in secret' (*en tō kruptō*, Matthew 6:4), and also with Paul's distinction between someone who is a Jew 'outwardly' and someone who is a Jew 'hiddenly' (*en tō kruptō*), and whose circumcision is 'of the heart' (Romans 2: 28–9). But the expression 'the hidden man of the heart' remains mysterious. It challenges translation, should one decide that the word-for-word translations of the Vulgate and the King James Bible are unacceptable. No versions are ideologically neutral, from the 'être intérieur' of a Belgian paraphrase I have by me, to the 'inmost centre of your being' of the New English Bible, or the 'inner personality' of J. B. Phillips. The Revised Standard Version, observing that the expression refers to women, gives, reasonably enough, 'the hidden person of the heart', but cannot avoid introducing other connotations of the word. More frustratingly, those translations which attempt to explain the expression merely screen it. One may not understand 'the hidden man of the heart', or 'qui absconditus est cordis homo', or Luther's 'der verborgene Mensch des Herzens', or Le Maistre de Saci's 'l'homme *invisible* caché dans le coeur', but they do suggest an inward reach of self to which one cannot penetrate but which is nevertheless real. No imagination can meddle with it, nor can any suspicion harm it. Or so St Peter says, and one may not believe him; he is, after all, addressing members of his sect. It is only if one does believe him that one feels like saying that, behind and despite the fantasy self, the grotesque person, the captive subject, the blind 'I', and as someone quite different from the *me* who I imagine myself to be, is a 'man', other, hidden, and maybe one day to be revealed.

Nearly everything I have said in this section is stated, more

memorably, in the fourteen verses of Psalm 19. The opening looks to the world outside: 'The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork'. It is hardly a spectacle laid before the sovereign regard of the *Cogito*: on the contrary, the world is active prior to observation and independently of it, and the 'I' is doubly put in its place, by the fact that the heavens are occupied with Someone else and that they address their declaration to themselves: 'Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge'. It is true that we are in the domain of rhythm and of rhetoric: 'In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun, Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race'; so we know that a poet is at work. But he is not there in his own name: humanity is present so as to perceive 'like' and to energise language. There is an 'I', but only as an unnamed someone in whom realisation and wonder occur.

There then follows, in verse 7, what seems an abrupt change: 'The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul'. Scholars apparently have good reasons for assuming that two poems have been joined together at this point, or that a second poet has added his own continuation to the six original verses. Whether the move was made by one poet, however, or by two or by a redactor, is finally unimportant. In the text that we have, the move makes profound sense. By implication, the law too is a vast and beautiful outward which likewise constrains us by declaring the glory of God. Even a contemplation of the physical world which sees it as the unceasing expression of God can become dangerously objective, aesthetic, and quite unreligious. Poets are happy writing descriptively about nature and the cosmos; the psalm allows no self-indulgence. The law is a firmament; the firmament is a law.

The shift from the creation on the one hand to 'commandments', 'statutes', 'judgements', etc., on the other, occurs, as is clear, from looking at the sun. 'His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it: and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof' (v.6). Almost for the first time one senses the earth, as the object of the sun's observation, and nothing is more 'natural', with hindsight, than to think of the inhabitants of earth observed by the law of God, as by a greater sun from which nothing is hid. That 'sun', incidentally, is not simply a threat. On the contrary: the law is described as 'reviving' the soul (*NEB*), as 'rejoicing the heart', as making the simple wise; its decrees are more to be desired than gold, 'sweeter also than honey and

the honeycomb'. The law also resembles the sun in that its commandment 'shines clear' (v.8, *NEB*), and 'gives light to the eyes'. As C. S. Lewis wrote: 'No one can improve on this and nothing can more fully admit us to the old Jewish feeling about the Law; luminous, severe, disinfectant, exultant'.[31]

There is another abrupt change at verse 12, which has not, as far as I know, attracted the attention of textual critics. One comes unexpectedly on this: 'Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults'. A sudden invasion of inwardness? A bit of 'Puritan introspection'? Surely not. Even the acknowledgement of divine law as a just and enlightening otherness can remain aesthetic: it does not necessarily engage one's life. So the psalmist will shortly pray to be 'kept back' from sin and to remain blameless of any 'great transgression'. But even casting oneself into the Law can never be entire, since one's self is not all available; 'I' can only peer into a darkness. So the psalmist turns first to his most radical need, and prays not out of self-knowledge but out of his ignorance. As St Peter in the New Testament speaks of a 'hidden man' open to grace, the psalmist in the Old recognises the secret or 'hidden' faults (*tōn kruphiōn mou* in the Septuagint) that must be cleansed, in a process which involves God and them but from which 'I' am excluded.

One sees that the poet is still at work. A sun from which nothing is hid has led to a clear-shining law, and leads now to the idea of secret faults. More remarkably, the final verse draws attention to the poet, in words whose familiarity from the liturgy is again likely to detach them for us from the rest of the psalm: 'Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer'. This is how the psalmist ends, and one of the referents of 'the words of my mouth' will be the psalm which he is ending. It is as if to write of such matters as the vault of heaven and the law of God gives even the psalmist pause; as if the final thing to do in any poem is to pray that it may be acceptable; as if, having admitted the need to involve – in the celebration of the works of God – not only his art and (as we might say) his imagination but the whole of his life, he seals this commitment with a poet's prayer; as if, since he knows that secret faults can lie in reaches of himself to which he does not have access, in his poetry too there might be secret faults which could prove unacceptable. It is a poem in part about poetry. But more than that: it is the perfect *exemplum* of a poem; a poem which

stands at one of the centres of poetry; and, in its expansive economy, a fundamental statement of Christian poetics.

For there is yet more. The ending is in no sense self-absorbed, in the manner of so many secular poems-about-poetry. This is partly because of the final vocative leap, in the very last words, towards God: 'O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer'; and partly because the beginning of the poem has already contemplated another and quite unattainable language. Consider again the opening verses:

> The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork.
>
> Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge.

The creation already declares the glory of God, before the poet arrives and on a scale which he can hardly match. It does so, moreover, without language as we know it:

> There is no speech, nor are there words;
> their voice is not heard;
> yet their voice goes out through all the earth,
> and their words to the end of the world.
> (vv.3–4, Revised Standard Version)

Far from the poet gazing at a world-as-spectacle of which he could become master and possessor, the world is more of a self than he, more, even, of a 'speaking subject', since its wordless language is perfectly secure, its declaration of divine glory cannot be unacceptable. Even to speak of that wordless declaration the psalmist has to use words, and he may even feel that the wordlessness of the day and the night is closer than his language to the Word of God. Their 'words' travel to the end of the world rather as the voice of God in Genesis calls across the spaces of the universe.

* * *

I have discussed versions of the self, and of its relation to the other. One needs to push all that further, to a climax, in fact, by exploring in more detail St Paul's notion of the 'not I', his

experiencing his own life, or rather the liver of that life, as 'not I, but Christ'.

One can begin with the well-known contrast in his letters between the 'old man' and the 'new man'. Our old man has been 'crucified', he tells the Romans (6:6); familiarity may prevent us from seeing once again how extreme such phrasing is. As a writer Paul was always at the edge. He continually amazes, and shocks, presumably because all his writings were, so to speak, posthumous; what he knew, he knew because he had passed through a particularly harrowing and definitive kind of death. If one believes what he says, one also knows why it is difficult to follow him, and how tempting it is to halt at the level of a literary commentary.

In Paul's world, however, the end of death is life, and so he completes the movement, as when he urges the Ephesians, 'That ye put off . . . the old man, which is corrupt . . . And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness' (4: 22–4). But what does he mean? Has he merely found a more forceful way of saying that one must try to become a different kind of person, and substitute, as in the New English Bible, a 'new nature' for an 'old . . . nature'? We only grasp his meaning if we hear its echoes. We might then remember that, according to Romans 8: 21, the whole creation is in the bondage of 'corruption'. The 'old man' begins to sound like the fallen Adam, and one sees that the new man too is 'created'. There is clearly a vast context for this change of being, and it becomes even clearer from a parallel passage in Colossians: 'Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him' (3: 9–10). If the new man is renewed in the image of his Creator, he is evidently another version of the original Adam, who was made in God's 'image' and 'likeness' (Genesis 1: 26). What occurs in the Christian, it seems, is nothing less than a second creation. He participates in Genesis, not by returning to the beginning but by becoming himself a new beginning, the place of a later origin – of a present origin – and one of a multitude of enactments of the single new Genesis which arises out of the demise of the old.

The focus, first and last, is Christ. According to the opening of John's gospel, 'all things were made' through the Word; the Greek is *panta . . . egeneto*. According to Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, 'if any man be in Christ' there is a 'new creation', in

which 'all things are become new' (5: 17); in the Greek, *gegonen kaina ta panta*. Both are referring to Genesis as translated in the Septuagint: as God spoke the word, the light 'was' (*egeneto*), evening 'was', morning 'was', and so on throughout the six days. John's purpose is to place Christ in that beginning; Paul's is to place him in the new beginning. Christ is the Maker and also the New-maker, and while we can only contemplate – read about – his making, we can experience his making new.

We are far, here, from the fragmented subject, the dumb non-identity, the aporia of selfhood; from all our nature's anxiety in a fallen world. And we are also far away, incidentally, from the Christian religion as the series of 'renunciations, interdictions . . . prohibitions' to which Foucault seems keen to reduce it, in the wake of so many others.[32] Since an old self has to die, renunciation will be part of the way; but the new self, which is no mere self but a new 'man', is presented as nothing short of the handiwork of God. 'I am come that they might have life', says Jesus, 'and that they might have it . . . abundantly' (John 10: 10). It could be that the Church has muffed and muffled that saying; maybe Foucault, in describing what has happened, is right. Perhaps *Christendom* has been gloomy, but *Christianity* is surely the religion of joy.

What Paul says about the 'new' also has implications for writing, and a special meaning for the writer. 'If anyone is in Christ – new creation – old things are passed away – look: everything is new'. I can only hazard a guess at what is offered here. It seems that the self out of which one's words have to struggle, from whose deadly influence they have to free themselves, is no longer object and obstacle. In its newness it can even be explored, since it is no longer 'I', 'I' is another, and even an Other. The world one sees also changes utterly. The light in which things stand has been transformed, and the most trivial and accustomed ground becomes a new-found-land. Once everything else has been dealt with, the doors of perception also are cleansed. And the most important matter here, since we are thinking about the self, is Paul's use of an ellipsis. The Greek says simply, 'If anyone [is] in Christ, new creation'. Should one translate 'he is a new creation' or 'there is a new creation'? Both, surely, and neither: the ellipsis, the verbal absence, is where self and world are no longer divided. 'New creation' names an event where, in their newness and because of their newness, the world and the self, the self and the other, are at one. It would seem that the prerequisite for attaining this

condition is to see and to accept something quite extravagant, that 'old things have passed away'.

It is another central statement of Christian poetics. It implies, in our terminology, both a theory of the self and a theory of the real. The Christian writer writes, or attempts to write, in every direction in the dimension of the 'new'. Perhaps it also implies a theory of rhetoric. There are two instances in the New Testament of the 'new man' acquiring a new name. One is 'Saul' becoming 'Paul'. The other is 'Simon' becoming 'Peter', and the context for this renaming in Matthew's gospel, though not, I should point out, in the other three gospels, is highly suggestive. Everyone knows the Word's pun: 'thou art Peter [*Petros*], and upon this rock [*petra*] I will build my church' (16: 18). But Jesus names Peter immediately after Peter, or Simon, has named *him*. Jesus has asked the disciples who the people think he is. The replies are 'John the Baptist', or 'Elijah', or 'Jeremiah', or 'one of the prophets'. When he asks them who *they* think he is, Simon answers, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God'. In renaming him, Jesus even takes up the idea of sonship: 'Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona', son of Jonah, because the renewed, renamed Peter will also become, in his own way, a son of God. I do not pretend fully to understand this mirror effect ('Thou art the Christ . . . thou art Peter'), and I realise that its meaning extends well beyond language; what does seem clear is that the new 'I' of Peter can be named because he himself has seen the new and has correctly named the Master of the new. If one wanted further evidence that Matthew is concerned this intricately with names, one would simply read on, to where, a few verses later, Peter rebukes Jesus for being willing to die in Jerusalem, and receives this retort: 'Get thee behind me, Satan' (v.23). Peter's first declaration was revealed to him not by 'flesh and blood' but by the Father; he became 'Peter'. This second declaration is the result, on the contrary, of his thoughts being not 'of God' but 'of men'; he becomes 'Satan'. In both cases, the other comes first, and a man is named, wonderfully or terribly, according to how he names.

One can of course 'suspect' Paul's notion of an old and a new man from numerous angles. It may be an expression of his schizophrenia. Perhaps ego-mania is simultaneously operating a symbolic death of the self, raucously acknowledged to be inadequate, and a sly projection of a golden self, said to be the very work of God. Roaming among the signifiers of the Septuagint, he

pieces together a masterly but purely self-enclosed verbal structure. As a man aggressively Jewish but living under an irresistible Roman domination, he dreams of a triumph which, being internal, cannot be challenged by arms and is quite irrefutable. One can even historicise the whole grand abstraction, namely Christianity, of which Paul's writings on the old and the new are a symptom, and decide, for instance, that 'Jesus' is the name for a final and exhaustive attempt at racial and cultural hegemony, along with an invasion of the now dominant language, as Jewry fades before Hellenism. My point is two-fold. Such suspicion is never neutral, as I suggested before, and historicising in particular is itself ideological. It is based on a faith, which believes that there is only history and that there is no Master of history. The reduction to history disallows the possibility of a truth which governs circumstance, so that a grand abstraction may appear at a specific time and place and be filtered through the local ideological, social, linguistic conditions, because it depends on them, and because providence has provided them. This is not, you will be aware, an avant-garde way of viewing the matter. What is more important, however, is that one always *can* suspect. The hermeneutics of suspicion is indefinitely available to anyone who intends to exercise it. To put it another way: there is no escape from the infinite regress of suspicion in the terms which that suspicion has laid down.

To return to the 'new man': one can continue to ask what Paul means. For in Ephesians 2: 15 his thought is even larger, when he declares that Christ has destroyed the enmity between Jews and Gentiles so as 'to make in himself of twain one new man'. The 'new humanity' of the New English Bible is again less than helpful. This description does see the new man as more than individual, and as constituted by the totality of Christians; but it also locates this 'man' in a particular Man, in Christ. The thought is sealed later in the same letter. Gifts such as prophecy and teaching are made to the church, Paul writes, for its edification, 'Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ' (4: 13). The 'new man', the 'perfect man', is at once the church and the Messiah himself; it is the body of believers and the body of Christ. Can there be anywhere a more jubilant vision of the raising and outering of the self? The less 'I' am merely 'I', the more I am He. The smaller the 'I', through a gradual

othering of attention, the larger the world in which I move.

So we arrive at the most important statement of all about the self, and it is another with which most people who think about these matters are familiar. In the course of John's gospel, Jesus appropriates for himself the name by which God is made known to Moses in Exodus 3: 14: 'Before Abraham was', he says, 'I am' (8: 58). *Egō eimi*: it sounds innocuous, but the Jews understand it well enough, and try to stone him for blasphemy.

Jesus claims for his 'I' a fullness of being which rides over times and tenses, and a depth which only a God can know. And he offers this being to his hearers, throughout the gospel, in the famous series of seven other pronouncements of 'I am'. Sometimes his being brims, and coruscates in figures: 'I am the true vine' (15: 1), 'I am the good shepherd' (10: 11), 'I am the door of the sheep' (10: 7); he is also the 'lamb' (1: 29). Once at least it appears as the reality of which the 'real' as we know it is merely the figure: 'I am the light of the world' (8: 12). It draws everything towards itself, nowhere more powerfully than when Jesus takes something precious which he and his interlocutors have named and declares that he is himself that object. The crowd challenge him with the manna that Moses gave to their ancestors, and ask *him* to give them life-giving bread. He answers: 'I am the bread of life' (6: 35). On being told that her brother Lazarus will rise again, Martha responds by saying: 'I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day'. One needs to have read from the beginning of the story to take the force of the immense reply: 'Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life' (11: 24–5).

There is a lightning journey here, from a doctrine to a Person. The doctrine of the resurrection is certainly something to be believed, but the resurrection itself is not the object of a belief: it is Jesus. The remaining 'I am' effects the same move, and it also has a peculiar interest for philosophy. Before the crucifixion Jesus tells the disciples that they know where he is going and the way he will take. Thomas is understandably baffled, and asks, 'how can we know the way?' The reply is, of course: 'I am the way, the truth, and the life' (14: 5–6). I invite you to consider that when Jesus claims that truth is himself, he writes a critique of Western metaphysics more radical than that of Nietzsche or of Derrida. We are used to Truth as a personification; we are presented with Truth as a Person. We may fear that truth is merely the ever-changing mirage in which successive generations imagine their oasis; we

are told that a singular truth does exist but that it is suspended within our relationship with a divine 'I'. The specific import that Jesus's words have for us in our generation may be this: they enable one to avoid giving in to opinion, and prefering *doxa* to *logos*, without having to assume that what is more than opinion is the transhistorical statement of an unconditioned concept. What is beyond opinion is a 'way', a 'life', the gradual knowing of truth through the practice of a Person.

Doesn't the 'way' also have radical implications for ethics? It sets aside, surely, all discussions of relative or absolute morality.

I said that the Jesus of John's gospel offers this being, by drawing all that we need (such as bread and light) and all that we look for (notably truth, and life) into his own 'I am', and giving it back to us infinite. He takes our aporetic 'I am' and secures it in the 'I am' as declared serenely by the Word. This does not make for closure. On the contrary: because it deals in infinity, the Christian 'theory' of the self, as the Christian theory of anything, declines to conclude for us, and opens, rather, to possibility. Christianity is not the answer, it is the quest. The self is not congealed, and one might even say, to use our passing vocabulary, that it undergoes *dissemination* even more after conversion than before. Before, the self is like a signifier: it suffers continual slippage, it is forever dispersed and re-formed, and we know this as failure, as the loss of self in a fallen world. After, the same thing occurs, but it is now, in part, the experience of the possible, of Creativity. 'Inside' and 'outside' have crossed over, and in this chiasmic exchange the horror of dissemination, of multiplicity, has become their joy. God himself dazzles with variety.

Laing writes, in *Self and Others*, that 'true sanity' consists in neither accepting a reified self imposed on one by others, nor claiming to be able to create whatever self one wills: 'I am not what they say I am, nor what I say I am' (97). Echoes of the gospels, though presumably unintended, are quite loud: 'Whom do men say that I am?', 'Before Abraham was, I am'. To speak like that, one must indeed be the Son of God or a maniac. If one is neither, the only way to say 'I am' is to allow *the* 'I am' to say it through one. It is again St Paul who seems to have found the right words. Reflecting on the fact that he once persecuted the church, but that, like the other apostles, he has nevertheless seen the risen Christ, he concludes: 'by the grace of God I am what I am' (1 Corinthians 15: 10). It must be the supreme human statement about the 'I'.

There may be an echo here of God's declaration to Moses: 'I am that I am', and if there is, the reference to the grace of God removes any hint of blasphemy, while the suggestion remains that, by the gift and activity of that grace, Paul has been allowed to participate in being. Again, it is not *that* he is which is of consequence, as in the Cartesian world, but *what* he is, and the repetition moves (to use yesterday's words) from the 'I am' of existence to the 'I am' of essence. Once again, the affirmation of an 'I' leads immediately to its denial. 'I laboured more abundantly' than the other apostles, he continues, but then adds at once: 'yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me'. One recognises his signature. In the Pauline, the Christian, experience of self, a salutary dialectic is at work. The more the 'I' is asserted, the more the 'not I' intervenes to replace it. The more the 'not I' increases, the more the 'I' becomes capable, capacious, to receive it.

9

History

Like the question of the self, the question of history has been pressing on this book since the opening chapter. It is the nature of history to press, and to oppress, and again the most surprising thing is that this should be so. Why should history not teach us wisdom, unequivocally, or why are we so constituted that we want it to? Why should it not have a luminous shape, an evident architecture, or what is there in us which makes us look for such things? If the world is random, why should that bother us? I can see no other reason than the one which has been proclaimed over and again but which no one wishes to hear: that we have suffered a loss of origin; that what we call history occurs because of that loss (we do not know what kind of passage through time there would have been in a world still in fellowship with its beginning), and that the writing of history is a testimony to that specific alienation. A choice was made to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and we have been eating it ever since. History is a consequence. It makes itself intelligible when seen, in part, as the temporal form of a punishment. It results from the Fall, and prolongs the Fall; it is our experience of falling. Because of such forces as love and grace, however, it is also our experience of being sustained. We fall, one might say, like the moon towards the earth.

So even the superabundance of history can be distressing, whereas copiousness, profusion, plenty, should be a joy.

History is, of course, our condition. We cannot totally extricate ourselves from it, any more than we can extricate ourselves from our bodies or the language we speak, which belong to history at least for the present. Nor, on the other hand, can we merely submit to it. The searching of the past is one of the ways in which we relate to history in the largest sense, as the movement of all things through time, with a view to changing it, and another of the ways in which we can make the temporal, temporary world a human habitation.

As we try to apprehend the past, to 'make something of it', are we not obliged, in part, to imagine it? I don't mean merely that we

have to imagine certain areas of the past for which there is a dearth of evidence, nor that the historian needs imagination among his gifts: I mean that we have to part-imagine the past in the same way that we have to part-imagine the real. We have no idea of how we should have known ourselves, others, the physical world, and the past, nor even how we should have named those categories, had we still been in communion with origin. Imagination is the way to that knowledge in a fallen world. This is no simple matter, and I want to approach it, and the other questions to which it will lead, through a particular historical figure: Arthur. He is, to be sure, an extreme case, quite possibly a mere fiction and yet a large and positive element of our history, and a continual presence in our writings. The fact that the imagination so obviously predominates in our reconstructing of him will be useful for considering what we think of as being independent of imagination.

How does Arthur connect to reality? He may not have existed at the end of the fifth century and the beginning of the sixth, but he has existed in every century since the eighth. He is related to the facts of his own period by very little. There are his name, which derives from *Artorius* and makes its bearer a Romanised Briton belonging to the class of owners of *villas*; the suspect title of *rex*, king, which he is only granted in writings from the eleventh century on; and another, more mysterious title which is to be found in earlier Welsh sources: *ymherawdr*, the native form of *imperator*, of which our version is 'emperor'. He is the convergence of a few words, as if his substance had been gathered into his names. He is already changed utterly, and he changes again in the *Legenda Sancti Goeznovii* of about 1075, which recalls that the Saxons were once humiliated 'per magnum Arturum Britonum regem', by the great Arthur, king of the Britons. The revival of this memory occurs just after a further defeat of those same Anglo-Saxons by William of Normandy, and one sees that the Celtic perspective somewhat alters the colours of the official history: David Jones points to a Welsh chronicler for whom Gwilim the prince of Normandy had '*defended* the realm of England'.[33] The reality of the king is henceforward his inscription in periods other than his own. It is a fact (and not a legend) that during the reign of Henry II, for whom Wace, the Jersey Norman, wrote his *Roman de Brut*, Henry of Blois excavated the Benedictine monastery at Glastonbury, of which he was Abbot, and claimed to have found a coffin with the inscription: 'Hic jacet sepultus inclitus rex Arthurus in insula

Avalonis', 'here lies the renowned King Arthur in the isle of Avalon'. It is also a fact that, in his correspondence with Pope Boniface VIII, Edward I claimed the throne of Scotland on the grounds that Arthur had subjugated the Scots; that each side in the War of the Roses alleged Arthurian descent; that even at the end of the sixteenth century the astrologer John Dee urged Queen Elizabeth to annex the lands of the Arctic Sea on the understanding that Arthur had colonised them.

Arthur exists in history, and even more so in literature. The *Historia Regum Britanniae* (*The History of the Kings of Britain*) of Geoffrey of Monmouth is reproduced over the centuries, in stories and poems from Malory and Spenser to Tennyson and other Victorians and, in our own time, Charles Williams, C. S. Lewis, David Jones. Its latest avatar is even a properly historical study, John Morris's *The Age of Arthur*, which manages to present its hero as the sole survivor of Rome when Europe and North Africa had been overrun by Germanic hordes and, quite simply, as the last Roman Emperor of the West.[34] The presence of Arthur, problematic as to the fifth century, is nevertheless continuous through our history – as is the presence of that other national, though initially imported, and equally nostalgic myth: Gothic architecture.

It is a question of the mode of existence of a historical character. The true history of Arthur, the history such as a historian could envisage it, is perfectly documented, since documents are what it is made of: we need not quit the domain of facts. They range from the most fanciful poems to examples of *Realpolitik* at its most realist. They provide information not about the person of Arthur but about the personage. They mix reality and a kind of dream, without reality being absorbed and disappearing.

Two of the earlier Arthurian works are of particular interest in terms of the sense of the real. The first well-situated text to mention Arthur, the *Historia Britonum* (*The History of the British*) which Nennius probably assembled towards the end of the eighth century, seems already concerned to correct a hyperbole, since it states with precision that Arthur fought with the British kings and was himself 'dux bellorum', the commander in the battles. This is what we recognise as a concern for historical exactitude, yet Nennius also wished, through what we might call an imaginative need, to gather the exploits of the celebrated general into a significant and even mythic form. By giving him twelve victories he places him under the influence of numerical signs, in the company of the months,

the zones of the sky, the apostles, and maybe even the labours of Hercules. We smile at that pre-critical way of doing history, and I can think of no way of conceiving that we could be wrong. Yet this tension between the very human desire to establish the strictest empirical facts and the equally human desire to bring contingent happenings into a necessary configuration, satisfying to another demand of the mind, coincides, surely, with the experience of the most rigorous modern thinker.

Geoffrey's *Historia Regum Britanniae* is the product of a reflection on the past which we should now call that of a mythographer, whose aim was to compose the legendary history of his people. Locked into our own mind-set, we perhaps mistake both his intention and his procedure. His work has its own learning, and if much of his material is *legends*, maybe one should use the word here not in its figurative sense of 'things to be read' but in the sense of 'things which should be collected, gathered, brought together'. I can see that this appeals to a literary writer (it calls to mind the classics of Modernism), and that a technical historian could be suspicious. I share his suspicion: yet I wonder if this way of remembering, of assembling a past, isn't the deep intention of history writing, whatever its methods and whatever its quite different definition of fact.

Geoffrey's *History* – or rather, the history of that *History* – also focuses another aspect of the question. It is the writing-out of a mythic reading of history, which derives the name of the island of Britain from Brutus, a Trojan prince, and which sends Arthur to the continent to wage war against the Roman senate. In English politics, however, from Henry II to James I, it participates in real history, by sustaining the claims of successive regimes or of their opponents. It traces through time the process which moves from *writing history* to *reading history* and *making history*, with the particularity that what goes in, in this case, is largely mythic whereas what comes out, though equally based on myth, has effects which are decidedly real: people, for instance, are killed. The history, in all three senses, is not innocent. The danger of the imagination at work in history is more evident, and more direct, than its danger in poetry. We are in a good position to know this, and can hardly ignore it, since our own century seems to have gone out of its way to illustrate the fact.

If the reality of Arthur is the use made of his legend, Arthur himself is a kind of absence. I don't mean simply that there seems

to be no proper evidence, though this lack is in itself astonishing, given the extravagant spread of his glory through Europe. What is even more suggestive is the negative which accompanies all his earliest appearances or non-appearances. The *Gododin* of the Welsh bard Aneurin, who was writing (unless he is himself a legend) around the year 600, celebrates not Arthur but another hero who, with all his deeds, was 'no Arthur'. Welsh poetry through the following centuries is rich in allusions, I gather, to Arthurian poems which for one reason or another have been lost. Above all, the *De Excidio Britanniae* (*On the Destruction of Britain*) of Gildas, composed around 540 by a monk who would have been a young man during Arthur's reign, describes the Romano-British resistance, under the leadership of Ambrosius Aurelianus, to the Germanic invasions without once mentioning Arthur. One might even think that this lack of reference, this almost pure void, is precisely what constitutes the meaning of Arthur. He represents a hiatus in our history; he figures in the hollow of the period of which we are most ignorant, and his legend does not so much deform history as form it from nothing.

It might be comforting to think that Arthur is a special case, and that hard fact is triumphant as soon as we turn to, say, administrative changes in the reign of Henry VIII. Yet history is something we experience, in the present, and it is here that the imaginative dimension of history is most apparent and most intimate. I may wander along the Essex coast, thinking of Arthur, as one can think of him anywhere, since the Celtic cycle lies, as David Jones says, 'under every tump in this Island'.[35] But where am I? Without calling on the imagination, I can name the near-by town, Colchester, and also the beach, the vegetation, the birds, the clouds. I walk on the surface of time, as in a room where all the decoration and furniture are new. I notice, however, among the names that start up, that one in particular, though immensely prosaic, ushers in the imagination without my having willed it: the North Sea. I notice too that even 'Colchester' sends me back to a Roman station and a British river, to a mysteriously Celtic 'Cair Colun'. If I give rein to the imagination I am in a Saxon county, the territory of the East Saxons, yet on a shore which is both Roman and Celtic; even the Celtic church established itself here. I am close to the town of Cunobelin, or Cymbeline, of the emperor Claudius, of Mithras, the sun-god of the Persians and of the Roman soldiers. With the aid of an almost persuasive fancy I

can even transpose the British name of the town, Camulodunon, into Camelot, and think myself into Arthur's kingdom.

We speak, rightly, of the *legend* of King Arthur, of a literary version of history, but historical reality is already – for me, here, and now – imagined, and if I fail to enter into it I am not 'hewn' from any 'rock'.[36] I do not even know what could be meant, without this or some other act of imagining, by such apparently transparent expressions as 'I am English', or 'I live in Great Britain', or even 'I am'. My eyes open to the sand and my ears open to the rumours of a cold sea, I explore another environment, more problematic yet equally vital, to be discovered through what Husserl calls the *Lebenswelt*, Heidegger 'ontic' reality, and Paul Ricoeur 'my life-world'.[37] I reflect on the threshold of history, on the liminary experience beyond which history begins for each one, on a kind of phenomenology of history.

The way to this historical environment passes through memory. Curiously, writing about Arthur has always been an act of long remembering, at least in the texts which have survived, and the memory of his kingdom has actually grown through the centuries. What one reads now is a series of remembrances of remembrances, which recall, for the imagination, the reality of the Celtic deposit of our past and the persistence of its charm, and also (but this is to anticipate) the mysterious domain and its loss. Without this, should we not feel diminished? I am aware, however – I remember – that Nietzsche condemned history, or rather, a kind of historical study and attitude, an 'excess of history', in the second of the *Untimely Meditations* on 'The Use and Disadvantage of History for Life' (*für das Leben*, precisely), on the grounds that memory leaves us incapable of creation, of 'youth', and that concentration on the past removes us from the only time that we inhabit really (§9).[38] Faced with the danger of passivity, of 'infinite scepticism' (§10), he argues the need for feeling and acting *'unhistorically'* (§9).

The year before the publication of the essay (1874) Rimbaud had written, in the final section of *Une saison en enfer*: 'Il faut être absolument moderne', 'one must be absolutely modern'. We are within one of the intentions of Romanticism here. Emerson also typifies it. He is a far cry from Nietzsche, and yet not so far in the essays on 'History' and 'Self-Reliance'. The latter refers, after all, to the 'monstrous corpse' of memory, and to great men (specifically Moses, Plato and Milton) as setting 'at naught books and traditions'. Its pronouncements include 'Our reading is mendicant and

sycophantic', and 'imitation is suicide'. Its fundamental thinking surfaces in phrases like the following: 'history is an impertinence and an injury, if it be anything more than a cheerful apologue or parable of my being and becoming'.

In Emerson's case the posturing is absurd, though the extremity of his formulas does make the issues clear, and there is something grand in his egotism: who else could have written, in a sentence where the very lack of a sense of the ridiculous makes possible the power of the expression: 'In every work of genius we recognise our own rejected thoughts: they come back to us with a certain alienated majesty'? And yet (while we are thinking of Emerson), the man who held that 'Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of our own mind' could also, when thinking of 'this pleasing contrite wood-life' which God allowed him, relate himself generously to a world beyond him: 'My book should smell of pines and resound with the hum of insects'; and he could also, in 'History', *look* as finely as this: 'In the woods in a winter afternoon one will see . . . the origin of the stained glass window with which the Gothic cathedrals are adorned, in the colours of the western sky seen through the bare and crossing branches of the forest'.

I invoked Nietzsche, and then felt the need, quite naturally it seemed, to bring in Rimbaud, Emerson, Romanticism: I should agree with the ironic remark he might make, about this turning aside into scholarship (which is a dignified word here for 'other books'), about this flight from an idea into the safety of history. It *is* 'grey-headed' (§8) and our education encourages it, and makes it almost inevitable. It does have a certain usefulness, on the other hand, provided one is aiming for the problem itself beyond its various *exempla*. It is worth realising that Nietzsche belongs to his moment and was intervening in a specific historical situation. His sense of the oppression of history came to him inside his century's preoccupation with history, and also links him to Montaigne and to Eliot, with their kindred fear of the past and its books as a threatening plethora. Yet he refused to submit to the idea that we are 'late-comers', and protested against a capacity not for culture but for 'knowledge about culture' (§§4, 10). As to that latter phrase, what would he say now of the intensity, in every field, of commentary? Of the delight in, and consequent power of, theory as opposed to work? Of the proliferation and success of middlemen and middlemen's middlemen? He strikes home, out of the German context of 1874, and it is actually Christianity which receives the

blow. He derives the excess of history from 'the hopelessness that Christianity bears in its heart towards all future ages of earthly existence'. Because of Christianity the 'deep and serious contemplation of the unworthiness of all past action, of the world ripe for judgement, has been whittled down to the sceptical consciousness that it is anyhow a good thing to know all that has happened, as it is too late to do anything better'. Against this he sets 'the ancient Greek world, where all was great, natural and human', and where one finds 'the reality of a true unhistorical culture' (§8).

I rather doubt that the culture of the Greeks was unhistorical: that is surely a nostalgic view, as of a golden age, a displacement of the veneration for origin of which Nietzsche was so scathing. About Christianity, which he makes to look rather like Ecclesiastes, one might be allowed one's own say. But I prefer to be unseasonable by agreeing that history is now and in England, or in Germany; that here and now and in the future is where one is called on to live; and that a hopelessness as to the earthly future is a denial not only of the Incarnation but of the continuance of the divine energy of creating. In literature, as Paul de Man notes, one finds somewhere in all periods 'the obsession with a *tabula rasa*, with new beginnings', whose motives, it should be added, are usually unpleasantly mixed, but whose presence is not restricted to literature.[39] Nietzsche exemplifies, in fact, what would seem to be a profound and continuous and proper restlessness, which a Christian would derive from the Fall, since the Fall, by vitiating the Beginning, sends us away forever seeking a new beginning. That must, indeed, be the perspective in which to view history, in the knowledge that, just as the new in literature can change poetics and even the literary past, really new social experience can change historiography and even the historical past.

In terms of history as that which we make, is there a necessary dialectic here, between remembering and forgetting? Strangely, Arthurian legend offers to such a dialectic a coherent and suggestive context. It certainly encourages remembering; but since Arthur is a once and future king it invites one into history both as the memory of the past and as a present activity with a view to the future. One might consider all myths of a return as myths *about* history and myths *for* history, and I should not like to attach this aspect of the Arthurian cycle too narrowly to the Christianity which appropriated it. Nevertheless, the unsoundable words of the communion service: 'this do in remembrance of me' (Luke 22: 19,

1 Corinthians 11: 24), are also a powerful, 'mythic' appeal to history in both senses, and a demonstration of their mysterious unity. The word 'history' means something like 'knowledge by inquiry', or 'search': history is both our practical search for the past and our equally practical search for the future. It enables one to hold together biblical declarations and injunctions which only seem contradictory: 'Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations: ask thy father, and he will show thee; thy elders, and they will tell thee' (Deuteronomy 32: 7); 'Behold, I make all things new' (Revelation 21: 5).

One might recollect here that Memory is the mother of the muses. If at their birth she gives them her own nature, the gift of recalling and calling back, it is a creative gift, which they exercise in the world over which they are sovereign, the world of imagination. Clio herself imagines the past, and the historian and the storyteller meet in their function as makers of images. History opens to the heuristic power of the imagination; even fabulous poetry may open to the real, as when Spenser claims, in the proem to Book II of *The Faerie Queene*, that his Arthurian domain is 'matter of just memory' (l. 5).

* * *

We are coming to the old question, of course, of the relation between history as event and history as the telling of event: between, ultimately, history and story. At this point most would agree that history is implicated in the imagination, or something like it: to reach King Arthur, as to reach King Edward VII, one is obliged to travel via narrative, the figure of memory, and to acknowledge that the identity of the other is also the story one tells oneself, or hears from someone else, of who the other is. The particular and powerful appeal of the Arthurian story, however, is that it is modelled on the very form of story, owing, no doubt, to its somewhat reduced factual content, and so can tell us about the imagination at work in the world. I suggested in *Towards a Christian Poetics* that story is a search for beginning and for end. It submits the galore of the real to its own finality, to which we have access through the magic formula, 'Once upon a time'. The opening words, which usually produce an event in the narrative past, are deeply ambiguous: they create an unreal, Edenic time while also witnessing to its loss, not because it exists in the unrecoverable

past of the real but because it occurs outside of our kind of time. The Arthurian tale actually recounts this loss of an earlier and other world, and I shall return to this aspect of it later.

The opening responds to an urgent need, for a time-less origin, and the historian may be aware that his search for a beginning is more than the search for the earliest sign of whatever it is he is about to discuss. So if history refuses a Beginning the historian as writer may fall back on a narrative beginning of his own. I looked earlier at Milton's engagement with beginning in *Paradise Lost*. In *The History of Britain* (in the course of which he doubts Arthur's very existence: it is a document of the time), he starts with a sentence which, while using the word 'beginning', acknowledges its absence from history: 'The beginning of Nations, those excepted of whom sacred Books have spok'n, is to this day unknown'. After a few preliminary remarks, however, one finds him looking to his narrative in these terms: it is a narrative 'Which, imploring divine assistance, that it may redound to his glory, and the good of the *British* Nation, *I now begin*'. I, now, begin: history may elude him, but narrative is within his power, and he can proclaim this by giving to his own beginning all the authoritative rhetorical signs of a literary commencement. Milton is concerned only with the history of Britain, yet his move here is paradigmatic. And its profounder meaning is surely that, while we cannot have origin, which is divine and belongs to unfallen humanity, we can have beginning, which is human in the only way that we know the human, and belongs to fallen humanity.

The first words of story, whatever they are and however banal they may be, offer a new beginning, that of another world – a world, that is, with the specific otherness of story – which is slowly elaborated through what follows. I trust that we are still capable of seeing the difference between related history and the relation of story, since such matters as sanity and salvation depend on it; it is nevertheless the case that the telling of history too opens it to the dimension of story. It gives it shape, through a number of inevitable processes which range from the structuring of the narrative to the ordering of the sentences.

The final words of story announce its achievement, raise it to the level of teleology, and are always, for that reason, satisfying, even if the *telos* in question is quite wretched. The end of the story is also a new beginning: fictive for the characters, who live on in a kind of future perfect secure from the encroachments of what is

outside story; real for the readers, whom story finally sends out to their existential tasks, to the cultivation, for example, of our garden. The end of the Arthurian story is at once an unhappy ending, of betrayal, failure, and death, and the promise of happiness, of the king's return. It issues, in Christian terms, into the period of the 'last days'. History, on the other hand, refuses end, just as it refuses origin; but the story of Arthur recounts an ending in the past that opens to a future which would be the End itself. Its ending does not end, but leads the reader – or so the story says – into a History which has been redefined as a waiting.

In Christian thought, and specifically in the Bible, history and story have always intermingled, no doubt because of the underlying relation between things and words, the world and the Word. *Res* and *verba* do not totally coincide, but the *res* which are of significance to salvation-history are already *verba*, signs, words of the gospel. So the Old Testament is the story of a history whose story foretells the New Testament, while the New Testament, which explicates that story, is also the story of a history whose story awaits its fulfilment. The Old Testament is the figure of the New, the New Testament is the figure of the 'new heavens' and the 'new earth', and 'history', in Erich Auerbach's expression, is 'forever a figure'.[40] Like the writers of scripture, but also utterly unlike them, we also tell a story of history so as to tell the story which we believe history tells. The two extremes might be Ovid in the *Metamorphoses*, gathering all of history into a single story having innumerable variations each of which nucleates the one tale, and Nietzsche, telling the story of how history should be un-storied. Since the story is not self-evident, since the meaning of history, or the un-meaning, or the multiplicity of meaning, is not given, of making many history books there is no end.

Linking 'real' events into a historical narrative responds, among other things, to the same intention as linking 'imaginary' events in a literary narrative. We write narratives and read them, whether novels, tales, *chansons de geste*, epics, legends, or jokes, because we should like the world – life – to resemble story, having coherence, design, unity; and we should like history itself to resemble a story. The desire is instructive; but other desires, we know, would merely play havoc with the past. How can one make sure of writing a historical narrative, or experiencing history in one's own life, in such a way that the activity is governed by imagination and not by fancy? How can one protect the putative

real, given its own evasiveness and our propensity to corrupt? The real is always considered by someone, and one has to recognise with Michel Foucault that 'All knowledge is rooted in a life, a society, and a language that have a history', and that 'The more History attempts to transcend its own rootedness in historicity . . . the more clearly it bears the marks of its historical birth'.[41] In a plural, relativised, fragmented world – or, to shift into another discourse, in a fallen world – my narrative of history will always be, in one way or another, the narrative of my history. The development of the Arthuriad is an obvious illustration. Far from being monolithic, or rather monologic, it changes according to the experience, the needs, the outlooks of the societies which adopt it. At times it serves to unify a multiple and fractured world into a knot of brilliant imagery: in his march towards Bosworth Field, Henry Tudor flies the red dragon standard of Cadwalader, a Welsh prince whom he claims as his ancestor; on becoming king he declares his descent from Arthur, has his son born at Winchester, the city of the Round Table, and calls him 'Arthur'. It is clear for us that this 'tale' from the end of the Middle Ages envisages Arthur, Cadwalader, and even Winchester, from the bias of its own 'cultural episode' (Foucault, 371). John Morris's *The Age of Arthur*, to which I referred above, describes the resistance of Britain under its prestigious leader, as the last bastion of civilisation once all the other countries of Europe have succumbed, and thereby witnesses to a nostalgia thoroughly Churchillian. With Arthur we are dealing with a legend and an obscure period of history; we are also capable of appropriating for our own ends periods which are fully documented and public.

The problem would not arise if history could be reduced to facts, but to reproduce an event is not to understand it. There is, of course, no simple answer; there is, however, being willing to look for one, and maybe accepting that ignorance and lack are the best beginnings. Since we are always obliged to start from *here*, to consider Arthur or MacArthur, Mount Badon or Mountbatten, in the course of a social and personal existence bound in place and time, and over a great distance, a certain poverty is all to the good. In thus moralising the matter, I am thinking among other things of the essay on 'Objectivity and Subjectivity in History' in Ricoeur's *History and Truth*. Subjectivity, he argues, is not only inevitable but necessary, but whereas the 'moi *pathétique*', the pathetic *I*, is the *I* of resentments, hatreds, indictments and much else, the 'moi de

recherche', the seeking *I*, is capable of opening one to the past, as to the present, since it is the movement towards the alterity of the world, towards the other (31). I think we know the pathetic *I*: here is some more Emerson (from 'History'): 'All inquiry into antiquity, – all curiosity respecting the pyramids, the excavated cities, Stonehenge, the Ohio Circles, Mexico, Memphis, is the desire to do away this wild, savage and preposterous There or Then, and introduce in its place the Here and the Now. It is to banish the *Not me*, and supply the *Me*'. (It sounds like a manic rejoinder to St Paul.) The seeking *I* is less familiar; almost alien, in fact, and rather redoubtable. It is satisfying to think that, as Ricoeur indicates, etymologically at least the 'moi de recherche' is an *I* for history.

* * *

I began by suggesting that what implicates the imagination in our dealings with history is the lack of origin. Story, as a specific practice of imagination, and in particular the story of Arthur, brings us round again to the theme of origin, and also to the theme of return which accompanies it, and to the need to ask, now, what they mean for the human condition and its situation in history.

For the trouble with origin, or rather the idea of origin, for anyone who wishes to lay it aside so as to study 'genealogy' (Nietzsche) or an entirely secularised history however understood, is that it keeps recurring and so constitutes part of the history which one has given oneself to investigating. For the English (I use the term loosely) Arthur is the central story of origin, and one sees that he is actually the threshold to an even more distant origin, for in the deeper shadows behind him is the figure of Brutus. One of the strangest stories that Europeans have told themselves about their history concerns the founding of their country by survivors from Troy. Aeneas founds Rome, Francus France and Brutus Britain, according to Nennius's *History*. Racine must have thought that, as late as 1676, the presence of a Trojan at the beginning of the French monarchy would have had some kind of sense for his compatriots, since he refers to it in connection with the survival of Astyanax/Francus in the second preface to *Andromaque*. In sixteenth-century England one could still refer to London, or Troynovant, as a new Troy, and in the seventeenth century the Stuarts continued to use the Trojan tradition for political ends. James VI and I claimed that by accepting the throne

of England he was reuniting the parts of the kingdom that Brutus had unfortunately divided among his sons; and so as to restore the country's former name he declared, against the will of the House of Commons, that as king of the whole island he would be king of 'Britain', just as Brutus and Arthur had been.

It is not immediately obvious why one should want to descend from the conquered. (Descending from one of the sons of Noah, on the other hand, has obvious attractions.) Did several nations choose Troy rather than Greece as their first fatherland so that the story of their origin should also be the story of a promise, of the survival of what seemed to be doomed? Legendary history joins tragedy here; it looks for lost grandeurs and invents a future for them, far from their place of origin, as proof that any wasted marvel may be reborn. In *The Faerie Queene*, an Arthurian poem and a national epic, Merlin prophesies that the British race, springing from 'the ancient *Troian* blood', will 'reuiue the sleeping memorie / Of those same antique Peres' (III 3, 22). The British myth is even doubly resurrectional, since Brutus is the great-grandson of Aeneas: Britain gives new life both to Troy and to ancient Rome.

Do such stories also invent a recovery out of loss so as to respond to the loss of origin? All these origins are devised in writings, and the writings are themselves re-writings: Nennius and Geoffrey of Monmouth, like the French chroniclers, rewrite the *Aeneid*, the *Aeneid* rewrites Homer, and Homer rewrites who knows whom? There is a regression of writing as there is of origin. Even with the landings on this island 'it is always a case', as David Jones says, 'of before and before again', while to pray for the dead means adventuring into 'the unknown beginnings'.[42] Words travel into pre-history and become silent, before ever reaching an origin; they are lost in a kind of immense and unknown before-world which absorbs and stuns all our questions. So we devise recoveries. But for the recovery to have power, the loss needs to be focused into an equally powerful image. The exclusion from Eden provides that image, of course, as does the destruction of Troy, yet a strange feature of the Arthuriad is that it re-imagines loss and that its appeal resides in that loss. As an image of origin, it offers a country on the confines of reality, a bygone kingdom, united and radiating from a prodigious centre. Reality is not entirely absent from the vision: it *was* the Romans who created the idea of a united Britain. The title *Comes Britanniae*, or count of Britain, survived in the *Prydein Wledig*, or lord of Britain, of the British themselves and in

the *Bretwald* of the Anglo-Saxons. It is not impossible that after the departure of the legions a series of British emperors ruled over most of the country. But Arthur's kingdom is slightly displaced with respect to the real country. Like the whole early Celtic experience, it is something of a 'spellbound world . . . the "demi-paradise" of our western fringes'.[43] The land of Logres, which seems to name Arthur's kingdom from the time of the *Lancelot* of Chrétien de Troyes, is said to derive from the Welsh Llœgr, 'a land of faerie which was also Britain or within Britain'.[44] Spenser in *The Faerie Queene*, while consulting Elizabethan chroniclers such as Stow, Holinshed, Grafton, and Hardyng, makes of the Arthurian domain a kind of parallel or within-world, so that Queen Elizabeth, by looking into his mirror, might see the real world transposed, her 'owne realmes in lond of Faery' (proem to Book II).

It is a moment not quite in time and a kingdom which hovers over geography, slowly elaborated by a succession of writers. (The earliest mention of the mysterious forest and of the hermits one meets there, for instance, only occurs at the end of the twelfth century, in Layamon's *Brut*, the first Arthurian text in English.) But Arthur's kingdom is struck through with melancholy: the great myth of the island tells of a king who dies and of a company which falls apart. It is true that Arthurian legend is always-already nostalgic, because its most 'real' meaning is the loss of hope for the British after the country had been overrun by the Anglo-Saxons, the disappearance into the mist of a vanquished country. But this does not entirely account for the appeal of the opening paragraph of Malory's final story, 'The Most Piteous Tale of the Morte Arthur Saunz Guerdon', surely one of the greatest beginnings in English literature:

> In May, whan every harte floryshyth and burgenyth (for, as the season ys lusty to beholde and comfortable, so man and woman rejoysyth and gladith of somer commynge with his freyshe floures, for wynter wyth hys rowghe wyndis and blastis causyth lusty men and women to cowre and to syt by fyres), so thys season hit befelle in the moneth of May a grete angur and unhappe that stynted nat tylle the floure of chyvalry of [all] the worlde was destroyed and slayne.

That single sentence, so perfectly shaped and withheld and released, fixes the image of a great loss at the moment of rejoicing

and gladness, and subliminally persuades the reader of the connection between its natural and human worlds by uncovering the literal meaning in the metaphor of the 'flower of chivalry'. Not December or January but May is the cruellest month, and one remembers that it is from this Arthurian world that *The Waste Land* derives.

According to the fundamental movement of the story, however, this lost past has, of course, a future. Malory himself reports, at the end of his tale, what 'many men say', that the inscription on Arthur's tomb runs, 'Hic iacet Arthurus, Rex quondam Rexque futurus', 'here lies Arthur, king once and future king'. As a matter of fact, many men did say it: this is not a literary invention. A French chronicle reports that certain of the canons of Laon, having come to the west country in 1113, met with the claim that Arthur was still alive, and complained of having found in England the same trouble over King Arthur as the Bretons were causing the French.[45]

The dream of a hero who is not dead but sleeping and who will return is widespread in folklore and pagan mythology. Arthur may even derive from the Celtic pantheon. The myth was soon christianised, nevertheless: the tenth-century *Annales Cambriae* present Arthur as a Christ figure who, to sustain his troops at the battle of Badon of 518, carried the cross on his shoulders for three days and three nights; while his return is everywhere associated, at least implicitly, with the Second Coming. (The sleeping lord in David Jones's poem of that title, whom the land awaits but who, according to the final lines, may himself be 'the wasted land', is related to Jesus as 'the sleeping Lord' at the close of Milton's 'Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity'.) One should nevertheless take note that the economy of return in the Bible is actually more complex. Adam in a way returns in Christ, the 'first . . . Adam' in 'the last Adam' (1 Corinthians 15: 45), the 'first man' in the 'second man' (verse 47), though only by way of *figura*: Adam, as the origin of mankind which was lost, is 'the figure of him that was to come' (Romans 5: 14), that is, of the new origin which is now under way. The promise of Christ's return is itself a re-writing in the New Testament of the hope of the Old: the prophecy that the Messiah will come is transposed into the prophecy that the Messiah, having come, will come again.

Arthur disappears in the legend, 'ab humanis actibus evocato', in the words of the *Legenda Sancti Goeznovii*, 'called away from the

activities of men', just as he disappears in history, as if to focus attention on an absence. And it is in history that he returns, not once but in each generation. The prophecy is fulfilled in British and Welsh writings, in the Anglo-French world of the Normans and the Plantagenets, at the courts of Anjou and Champagne, in the dynastic politics of the Tudors and the Stuarts, and in other isolated texts down to our own day. He really has proved, strangely, a *rex futurus*. But it is the larger rhythm of his story which is important, its opening to origin and to end, to golden age and to apocalypse. For its shape is all-encompassing. Arthur was here, he is absent, he will return; the world was presence, 'real life is absent',[46] being will be. The most famous expression of the motif is found in the equally encompassing *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* of Milton, whose titles no less than resume, for the West, the story of history. The story is Christian, yet Proust in our own century, by passing from 'lost time' to 'time regained', was able to re-write Milton from a perspective entirely profane. A further disadvantage, incidentally, of Scott Moncrieff's title for Proust's novel, *Remembrance of Things Past* rather than *In Search of Lost Time*, is that it obscures this Miltonic echo. *A la recherche du temps perdu*, the overall title, and *Le temps retrouvé*, the title of the final book, call up the French titles of Milton's poems, *Le paradis perdu* and *Le paradis retrouvé*.

Golden age and apocalypse are the two limits of our historical *imaginaire*: they stretch beyond history strictly so called. They reach for a paradise in, or before, the past and for a paradise in, or beyond, the future. They represent an extreme attempt to transcend history, to give form to the multiple disordered, so as to project it, according to Yeats's memorable expression in 'Sailing to Byzantium' (which gets its power from the inversion of a familiar phrase) into 'the artifice of eternity'. They must, to the tough-minded, seem dangerous nonsense.

It might be even tougher to think that what they mean, what we mean by them, is both dangerous and necessary. It comes not from a dream or a dogma but from the perception that the world is not what it could be according to its perceived possibilities, and from a, necessarily, obscure sense that it is no longer or not yet what it is virtually. Without that sense one misses a dimension of the real, and the most positive, just and good action, whether private or political, whether involving a neighbour or a whole society, is shadowed by a melancholy from which there is no

escape. The fear is that a concern for a non-historical past and especially for a non-historical future must void the present and drain the will, and there is no doubt that this can be the case. It can produce a kind of future-oriented nostalgia. Yet the New Testament, a mis-reading of which is responsible for this irresponsibility, is full of earthly, local, daily injunctions concerning, for instance, a 'patient continuance in well doing' (Romans 2: 7). The prose of this grounding in the here and now of obligation is related to the poetry of further ends and larger dimensions. 'Waiting' is looking beyond history and beyond the life which ends in death, yet 'patience' is the mode of waiting: 'if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it' (Romans 8: 25). God is that which most absolutely transcends today and the whole of history, yet He is described as 'the God of patience' (Romans 15: 5). There is a perfect to-and-fro between the transhistorical and the ethical demands of the moment, so that the latter rise above melancholy while the former descends into the reality of historical men. Christianity is not a religion of the last moment of life, except insofar as *this* moment is the last, and one could be found now in 'patience' as at the point of death. It is a religion of history, and even a religion *for* history, in that it is concerned with 'redeeming the time' (Ephesians 5: 16, Colossians 4: 5); it is dedicated to a redemption of history through each of its moments.

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But is there a Christian reading of history? Well, as one knows, there have been many such readings. Rather than repeating them I should like simply to look again, and to see at least some of the things that might be said now. I shall do so by focusing on an anti-christian reading to which I have already referred, Nietzsche's, as expounded by Foucault in the essay 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History' to be found translated in the Penguin *Foucault Reader*. The interest of viewing Nietzsche through Foucault is that Foucault's own writings bring the attack up to date. He identifies in Nietzsche three 'uses' of history. 'The first is parodic, directed against reality, and opposes the theme of history as reminiscence or recognition; the second is dissociative, directed against identity, and opposes history given as continuity or representative of a tradition; the third is sacrificial, directed against truth, and opposes history as knowledge.' Together they 'imply a use of history that severs its

connection to memory, its metaphysical and anthropological model, and constructs a countermemory – a transformation of history into a totally different form of time' (93).

The parodic use declines to venerate, to fix the high points of history in their essence and maintain them in a kind of perpetual presence. One recognises in this rejection of what the second *Untimely Meditation* calls 'monumental history', the corresponding rejection in some literary-critical circles of the canon of literary monuments. In both cases the rejection is surely correct, since otherwise one immobilises history and literary history into the value judgements of yesterday. The wisdom of each generation does need to be disrupted, and the past prised out of its grasp, not because we see such-and-such a generation as our class enemy, for instance, but because no generation is truly wise. A Christian perspective certainly suggests that God's view of the canon of historical monuments is likely to be roughly the opposite of ours: His making so much of an insignificant occurrence in an outpost of Tiberius's empire is a blatant example of His disruption of a proper sense of the hierarchy of historical events, and a hint that the divine vision let loose in the world would enact joyous, wrathful, unceasing and lightning parodies far beyond our ability to follow. Not being divine ourselves, it is as well to make sure that our own disruptions issue from the *moi de recherche*, from the searching 'I', and not from a wish for personal or social revenge, or from despair, or from the desire for a vision of one's own, which are merely a demonic parody of parody.

Do such thoughts and *The Waste Land* not throw light on each other? Eliot's poem is in one way a writing of history in line with 'chronicle' rather than 'history' proper, to use a modern distinction. Eliot proceeds in the manner of Nennius, who declares in the preliminary matter to the *Historia Britonum*: 'coacervavi omne quod inveni', 'I have made a heap of all that I have found.' There are many and various ways of 'finding', as of showing, and as I suggested earlier in connection with *legenda* and Geoffrey of Monmouth, a Rankean prejudice against chronicle maybe excludes us from the understanding of other methods of gathering what is important, of assembling an inheritance. Eliot's method, however, is obviously also parodic: the 'heap' that he has made, and to which he also refers at the beginning, is of 'broken images' (l. 22), and what he has 'shored' against his 'ruins', according to the end, is merely 'fragments'. He puts together his *historia* in a late culture,

a 'hyper-Alexandrian and megalopolitan situation' as David Jones calls it in the preface to *Anathemata*, as if he were an early chronicler groping for the shards of a past slowly disappearing into the gloom. *The Waste Land* is a Nietzschean, though not a fully Nietzschean, operation on the past, in which the monuments are countered and 'memory', evoked as early as line 3, is made unwelcome.

This is also a different perspective on to 'influence'.

Insofar as the dissociative use of history is an undoing of traditions and continuities so as to 'make it new', I have already considered it earlier in the present chapter. I also considered, in the previous chapter and from a different angle, its determination not to discover the roots of our identity but to dissipate identity in the heterogeneity of multiple histories. I assume that we cannot assemble the single self of history any more than we can assemble a single self for the self. It is true that to halt at that point is to be satisfied with half-knowledge, yet the Nietzschean position speaks powerfully to Christianity in its distrust of synthesis. A Christian claims to see, in the Old and the New Testaments and in their relation, that God is a God of history, that history is governed by providence and is open at every moment to judgement, that it is a spiritual and ethical drama of choice and of wrong choice. The temptation is to plot that providence oneself and to utter its judgements, and so to usurp the position of prophet. As Paul Ricoeur writes in another chapter of *History and Truth*, 'Christianity and the Meaning of History', there is for the Christian a 'oneness of meaning' which disallows scepticism and ultimate discontinuity or absurdity, but it is a 'hidden meaning' (he is presumably thinking of Pascal's and Isaiah's 'hidden God'), a 'mystery' which will only be revealed at 'the last day' (93–4). History is presumably a perspicuous story for God, but to us, even if we can discern the outline, it looks more like a collection of aphorisms (Nietzsche) in need of continual glossing and reglossing (Montaigne).

For history in our human, our fallen-human, perspective is the domain of ambiguity, and has been since the Fall itself. What did Adam and Eve's disobedience achieve? Not knowledge, as from the Promethean and Faustian angle, nor the knowledge of evil, nor even the knowledge of good and evil separately, but the knowledge of good and evil together, and of their inextricable confusion in the new world which was beginning. Readers of Milton's *Areopagitica* will remember, from the passage dispraising

'a fugitive and cloistered virtue', this figure: 'It was from out the rind of one apple tasted that the knowledge of good and evil as two twins cleaving together leaped forth into the world', and maybe the speculation which follows, as to one of the ways at least in which this twinning and intertwining presents itself: 'perhaps this is that doom which Adam fell into of knowing good and evil, that is to say of knowing good by evil'. As in Pascal's reflection on the *grandeur* and the *misère* of the human condition and their mutual involvement, the suggestion is that the whole human enterprise, from self-consciousness and the relation with the other to migrations, empires, revolutions, suffers from an ambiguous and contradictory duality.

As I proposed in the opening chapter of *Towards a Christian Poetics*, it is possible to extend this dialectic. The three states of the king in the legend of Arthur: presence in the past, absence in the present, new presence in the future, themselves suggest the triads by which one might try to grasp the movement of history in a Christian perspective: creation, fall, re-creation; Eden, a 'cursed' ground, Paradise; innocence, sin, grace; nature, 'flesh', spirit; Adam, man, Christ. I should like to think that such a configuration of history has meaning even for someone who rejects the theology which sustains it. The fall and the rise, the changes of sign that occur at each of those antithetical reversals, are part of experience, while the ternary process of life, death and rebirth is the pattern of so much that we do and suffer. At the same time, precisely because of our situation in the middle things, *in mediis rebus*, the perception of such a pattern gives no warrant to rampage over history with judgemental certitude.

As to the third use of history, the 'sacrificial' use directed against truth, I have already had occasion in the previous chapter to discuss the ideological bias of this 'suspicion' and its nugatory unendability. What Nietzsche says, however, of the motives that enter into our desire for truth and our will to knowledge, which include such old friends as the spirit of competition and conflict, rancour and sheer malice where one would have preferred to find disinterested commitment, takes one back again to the French *moralistes* and to a 'cynicism' which is wise about sin. Why am I writing this essay? Yes, but why are you reading it? Unless I mistake you (perhaps I do), we should both prefer not to pursue the question too far. The Christian understanding of history includes a Christian understanding of the historian, and is harsh

in its unpeeling of intention. It might also be observed, nevertheless, that a genealogy of truth, of knowledge, and above all of reason, which succeeds in showing the warp of their beginning, cannot be shown not to have left them intact in themselves. Naturally, to speak of them existing 'in themselves' involves an act of faith, which many are not prepared to make; yet can it not also be observed that in practice they are making it continually?

Whenever we write, it is Saturday, should our writing be history, poetry, witticisms. We arrive in a history which is already under way, and even if we believe that everything has been done for history to be redeemed, for the dialectic of history to be resolved, we still inhabit a world on the near side of that resolution. History for the Christian has entered the time between the Friday of death and the Sunday of resurrection, or the last days that stretch from the Ascension to the Second Coming. What is for many the absence of God is surely, for the Christian, more specifically the absence of Jesus; yet here and now is where we are, both our home and a transit for strangers. That would simply be a matter of concern for the adherents of a particular faith if one didn't see in the most secular history – the history of the most secular people and events – a similar realisation that we fail eventually to inhabit, that life is absent, that history is the story of a restlessness. Ignorant of origin and of the future, we all live in a world in need of history, *historia*, 'learning by seeking'.

10

Re-Writing *The Waste Land*

In the opening chapter of this book I considered the distress of writing in terms of the plethoric 'many books' of whose making there is no end. I also considered the plethora of history and the search for a beginning, both of writing and of the world, along with the plethora of self in Montaigne's 'diverse . . . subject' and the fear of self in Eliot's experience of 'some stuff' impossible to 'drag to light'. Having gathered the questions of self and history in the last two chapters, I should like to return to that opening so as to confront all these matters again, not at large but with reference to Eliot's own re-working of them in *Four Quartets*.

Did his distress abate when he became a Christian? His views changed, but did they remove his earlier views? It is of interest to ask what we should expect. One might suppose that the standpoint of faith would make writing a straightforward, though challenging, activity, and would offer comfortable thoughts about the constitution of the self and the movement of history. Yet seeing things in a biblical light can render the 'vanity' of history, of self and of writing even more momentous and intolerable. To convert is to be shown a whole new world but also to realise more fully just how fallen is the old one. A Christian lives, I suggested, between two worlds, and although the second is *powerful* to be born, it is still not here. He has, but what he has is a 'pledge', a 'taste'; everything has changed, but the Change is for the future. Redemption makes a *différance*.

It is certain that after 1927, the year when he became an Anglo-Catholic and also, strangely, the year of Yeats's rough beast, Eliot set about dealing with his atheist past (I use the word with its Pauline meaning) by re-writing the works it had produced. Appropriately, *Four Quartets*, as the culmination of his Christian poetry, took on his most important pre-Christian poem and the one to which all his previous poetry had led. He seems to have seen the opportuneness of escaping from the waste land of time, and writing, and self, partly by, quite literally, re-writing *The Waste Land*. Yet *Four Quartets* recognises that to re-write *The Waste Land* is not to dismiss the waste land: that one cannot, by an act of

writing, simply enter a new world, and bracket the Fall. So Eliot, with a new faith, writes a poem which, while it explores that faith and the possibility it creates, also mocks its own pretensions to understanding and is even more rigorous than *The Waste Land* in its searching of our ills. Rather, indeed, as the New Testament, while promising and celebrating salvation, is more far-reaching than the Old in its condemnation of the world from which we need to be saved; and rather as Jesus Himself is fiercer than the Old Testament's wrathful, and loving, Jehovah. It is the gentle Jesus who says such things as 'Ye are of your father the devil', and 'Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire'. The horror of *Four Quartets* is less intense than that of *The Waste Land*, but more real: 'O dark dark dark. They all go into the dark'.

Conversely, *The Waste Land* is not without hope, so that in his re-writing Eliot was able to take hints from it. The final, albeit disguised, 'yes' in the Russian reading of 'DA' (l. 400), which is chiefly to engender the Sanskrit 'Datta', 'Dayadhvam' and 'Damyata', is a sign of Pentecost beyond the poem's Babel. The quotation in the closing lines from a sonnet of Nerval's: *'Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie'*, calls attention to a work which speaks, elsewhere and obliquely, of its author overcoming madness, or 'traversing Acheron', and of doing so by playing Orpheus' lyre. One remembers Eliot's own presence in sanatoria, and one sees the significance of emerging from hell with the instrument of the first of poets: what has enabled Nerval and Eliot to prevail has been the making of the poem. Though screened through being in Italian, the nearby quotation from Dante about the 'refining fire' introduces the hope of Purgatory. And the very scope of *The Waste Land* is itself a positive. Its ground is no less than the geographical area of our civilisation, so many of whose roots it reaches for and whose remote source it traces to India. In a way it really is an epic, which feels its way out to the limits and down to origin, like the *Odyssey*, the *Aeneid*, *The Faerie Queene*, *Paradise Lost*. It attempts to hold civilisation by charting it.

That *Four Quartets* re-writes *The Waste Land* is known to the extent that the structure of 'Burnt Norton' and subsequently of the other quartets follows its five-part division, with sometimes close parallels such as the brief fourth-section lyrics on death; and also that the later poem retraces the steps of the earlier from a garden or gardens to a chapel: from a natural place with mythic overtones to a spiritual; from a place for innocence before the Fall to a place

for guilt after. Both poems have a completed mythic shape, and the first is a kind of palimpsest for the second. But their beginnings and endings also hum with correspondences. The opening of *Four Quartets* takes *The Waste Land*'s 'dead tree', which gives no shelter and may have been the tree of life, for its own 'dead leaves' and a shrubbery which may be in Eden. It turns the child Marie, frightened on a sled, into hidden children, excited and containing laughter. It looks into the same 'heart of light' and silence, only to discover the same emptiness, while its 'pool' momentarily filled with an illusory 'water' is soon as 'dry' as the earlier 'dry stone' without 'water'. Its 'dust on a bowl of rose-leaves', meaning death, recalls the 'handful of dust' with its suggestion of the dead Adam. It too begins, in other words, with images of origin (tree, children, light, water, dust) and their occultation, and even the 'time present' from which it views them, so as to enter the strain of time past and time future, is a re-working of the fractured *now* of *The Waste Land*, heavy with 'Memory and desire'.

Four Quartets returns continually to the opening of the earlier poem, however, as part of its determination towards renewal. When the final lines of 'East Coker', for example, look through the 'empty desolation' of 'vast waters', or waste waters, they echo the cry, *'Oed' und leer das Meer'* (l. 42), as a preparation for the searching beyond it in 'The Dry Salvages'. They also add a specific meaning to the quartet's closing words: 'In my end is my beginning', since one of 'my' beginnings introduced into this end is the beginning of *The Waste Land*. And when the latter reappears in the 'midwinter spring' passage of 'Little Gidding', it is finally and perfectly reversed. Instead of a real spring spurned in favour of a forgetful, undemanding winter ('winter kept us warm'), a real winter is appropriated by an imagined but demanding spring (the 'soul's sap quivers'); rather than a spring unnaturally seen as 'cruel', a winter is spiritually perceived as bringing a new kind of life, 'neither budding nor fading'. Here, the re-writing is plainly in the interest of change, of religious conversion. As the last of the quartets, 'Little Gidding' even summarises *The Waste Land* once more, in its move from spring to a chapel. (Curiously, although the idea of a winter spring had already occurred to Eliot in *Murder in the Cathedral*, where the First Tempter observes: 'Spring has come in winter. Snow in the branches / Shall float as sweet as blossoms', the original typescript begins 'Midwinter summer is its own season', and the preliminary notes read: 'Winter scene. May',

which may also be a reference to summer if one remembers Langland or Shakespeare.[47] Only when working on the passage and replacing summer by spring does Eliot seem to have realised it as a consummate response to the cruelty of April.)

Indeed, as a poem which occupies the same geographical limits as *The Waste Land*, and which is similarly open to the suggestions of Indian religion, *Four Quartets* constantly takes up the matter of the earlier work so as to transform it. A dust which is only fearful becomes the sign of a necessary and ultimately joyful assent to mortality. Lust is re-written as love. The passive and frustrated 'memory and desire' become a vigilant 'aftersight and foresight' ('Little Gidding' II); the 'use of memory', in a perspective no longer Nietzschean, is seen as allowing love to expand 'beyond desire' ('Little Gidding' III). The waste land itself is transformed, into a 'life of significant soil' ('Dry Salvages' V), and into a series of real and imagined places, which strive towards the 'place of grace' of *Ash-Wednesday* V and the 'grace dissolved in place' of 'Marina'.

The location of the poet likewise changes. The writer in *The Waste Land* is placed, with an indirection which is itself indicative of the poem's discomposure, in a sanatorium, first at Margate (l. 300) then near Lac Léman (182) in a 'decayed hole among the mountains' (385) where there is a chapel empty and in ruins. The writer in *Four Quartets*, or someone like him, finds his way to the chapel at Little Gidding, which is also a 'shell' ('Little Gidding' I) but whose 'husk of meaning' is nevertheless available to the penitent who is serious. The poems move from a secular place of healing to a spiritual. And the reader changes, through the poems' address to him. He is no less slily involved, through the delayed apostrophe of 'Burnt Norton': 'My words echo/Thus, in your mind', but he is no longer an 'hypocrite lecteur' (l. 76), to be fleered and reduced along with the writer.

Four Quartets also reworks the rhetoric of *The Waste Land*. *The Waste Land* is continually contradicting, undoing, itself. It enacts the self-laceration of a fallen language, thrown into confusion not only by the event at Babel but by the serpent of Genesis questioning and then denying statements by God, and so disturbing words all the way back to the Word. *Four Quartets* also abounds in contradictions, but they work for reconciliation. It too suffers history and knows the antinomies of the Fall: the 'soundless wailing', for example ('Dry Salvages' II), of the sadness belonging to the sea. They cannot be written away; they are still written

down, with the same urgency. But it also rehearses the compatible oppositions of faith: 'the darkness shall be the light', 'where you are is where you are not' ('East Coker' III), as a deliberately traditional vision already entered into in the litany of *Ash-Wednesday* II. It reverses the wretched paradox of an April become cruel into the expectant paradox of a winter become spring-like. Its single untranslated quotation, 'Figlia del tuo figlio' ('Dry Salvages' IV), focuses paradox at the point where the Anglo-Catholic Eliot believes it to be redeemed, in the '*impossible* union / Of spheres of existence' achieved by the Incarnation (V, my italics). The poem reaches for the unsayable, for experience just beyond experience, in the ghost of 'Little Gidding' II who is 'Both intimate and un-identifiable', or, supremely, in the 'unknown, remembered gate' of the final section and the end of life. It essays to enter the dimension of 'Never and always' ('Little Gidding' I), through a rhetoric of negative approximations: the 'still point' is 'Neither flesh nor fleshless; / Neither from nor towards . . .' ('Burnt Norton' II). What it seeks, one might say, is oxymoron: a language and an imagination proper to a world fallen and yet capable of re-creation. The warring parties of the seventeenth century are seen as finally 'United in the strife which divided them' ('Little Gidding' III); a spray of lavender is thought of as 'Pressed between yellow leaves of a book that has never been opened' ('Dry Salvages' III).

Even the word 'figure' figures. At the outset, in the lyric of 'Burnt Norton' II, the 'wars' of the human and the non-human universe are 'reconciled' according to an older, figurative, vision expressed in an earlier figurative poetry: 'The dance along the artery / The circulation of the lymph / Are figured in the drift of stars'; 'We move above the moving tree / In light upon the figured leaf'. The end of the quartet continues to adhere to this interpretative scheme: 'The detail of the pattern is movement, / As in the figure of the ten stairs'. At the beginning of 'Little Gidding', however, the reader has to understand that his approach to the chapel is inadequate: 'Either you had no purpose / Or the purpose is beyond the end you figured / And is altered in fulfilment'. It is a nice pun: our end and purpose, as penitents or as poets, are ahead of what we reckon or represent. So the London street in the next section is left 'disfigured' (another pun) by the ghost and the Luftwaffe, in order that, in the next section and on the following page, the whole of experience can change:

See, now they vanish,
The faces and places, with the self which, as it could, loved them,
To become renewed, transfigured, in another pattern.

'Figured', 'disfigured', 'transfigured': it is a perfect ternary sequence.

Finally, there are the endings of the poems, where this transmutation of the earlier in the later is, as one would expect, the most evident. Rain does fall at the close of *The Waste Land*, yet the plain remains 'arid'; the last section of *Four Quartets* looks forward to discovering a river and a waterfall. The refining fire into which Arnaut Daniel immerses himself in the closing lines of *The Waste Land*, in a context which turns this vision of purgation into merely one of many jarring possibilities, returns secure in the 'refining fire' of 'Little Gidding' II and in the poem's last line. The troubled 'Shantih shantih shantih', which is either, indistinguishably, a deeply religious *envoi* or the utterance of a madman ('Hieronymo's mad againe'), becomes the quite untroubled 'All shall be well, and/All manner of thing shall be well' of Juliana of Norwich, repeated over and again as if part of a rite. Even here, however, the vision is set beyond apocalypse, and the certainties of the final lines are not overwhelming. They cannot prevent a phrase in 'East Coker' II: 'That was a way of putting it', from returning to the mind to rout complacency.

* * *

I wanted to consider that re-writing in detail, since it is obviously of importance in itself. My main concern, nevertheless, is to see its wider significance as part of a return, and in particular a return to beginnings. We know that Eliot was continually re-writing works of the past; after a time that past included works of his own, which he also began to re-write. His poetic activity after his conversion is more specifically a determined attempt to 'redeem' his earlier verse, by discovering redeemed experience to the side of the fallen experience which that verse knew so well. The world has accumulated a great deal of itself, and there is so much in any individual life; Eliot's poetry remembers, and burdens itself with memories. *Four Quartets* attempts to disburden itself, not by removing memory, or history, which would actually be to destroy the self and the present, but by saving memory. It does so in the way most

appropriate to the writer, by allowing Memory to become the mother of a now penitent muse. Being a long poem of discrete parts, it even leads him to re-write himself within the one work.

Four Quartets returns, time and again, to the beginning of his earlier poems. I looked at the way its own beginning recalls that of *The Waste Land*; it also recalls the beginning of 'Gerontion'. In that work, the sustained and syntactically blatant negativity of 'I was neither at the hot gates / Nor fought in the warm rain / Nor knee deep in the salt marsh, heaving a cutlass, / Bitten by flies, fought', endeavours, yearningly, to fabricate experience which did not exist. In 'Burnt Norton', the sounding of 'the passage which we did not take / Towards the door we never opened', creates the possibility that a recurring to what did not occur will give it meaning for the present. The first words of 'Gerontion': 'Here I am, an old man in a dry month', reappear in 'East Coker' V, which amends that self-regarding self-presentation into confession: 'So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years – / Twenty years largely wasted'. (The first version of the passage began 'Here I am'.) Gerontion's 'depraved May', which resembles the 'cruel . . . April' of *The Waste Land* in vitiating pastoral, appears again in the 'voluptuary sweetness' of May's hedgerows in 'Little Gidding' I, which is still ambiguous, dangerous even, but which is also resistible.

And beyond 'Gerontion' *Four Quartets* returns to the beginning of 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock': to the very first lines, that is, of the *Collected Poems*. That most notorious, and distraught, of modern similes: the evening 'Like a patient etherised upon a table', is recalled in the village of East Coker 'in the electric heat / Hypnotised' ('East Coker' I), where the dahlias too 'sleep' and where the reader could be hypnotised by the inducive words, a few lines later, of Sir Thomas Elyot; and in the 'mind' of a later section (III), conscious but conscious of nothing when 'under ether'. The mental inertia, on Eliot's first page, has once again been reviewed, however, since it now occurs in contexts which call for great vigilance, concerning the past and the 'darkness of God'. One sees that the references in this quartet to 'my beginning' take on, at these moments, an even more pointed meaning.

Perhaps the whole of the beginning of 'Prufrock' re-emerges, as Donald Davie has suggested, in the beginning of *Four Quartets*.[48] Both passages concern a journey undertaken or not undertaken, and describe walking through streets or down a passage as if it

were a moving through words. It is certainly true that, like the beginning of 'Prufrock', the beginnings of 'Burnt Norton', 'East Coker' and 'Little Gidding' all recount a visit.

Finally, *Four Quartets* also returns to its own beginning. It is a poem, after all, about the Beginning itself and the recovery of 'our first world'. 'Burnt Norton' already returns to its primal scene in its closing lines ('the hidden laughter / Of children in the foliage'); the lyric of 'Little Gidding' II ('Ash on an old man's sleeve') gathers the beginnings of each of the previous quartets and of 'Little Gidding' itself; we 'arrive where we started' in the final passage of the whole poem, in one sense because we are taken back, in so many of its words, to where the poem started.

That incessant return is motivated partly by the desire to purify moments, and especially initial moments, of the past. It is also motivated, in its further ambition, by a need for beginning, for origin: for an unsullied Eden of experience and of writing. The allusive manoeuvre of *The Waste Land* involves, or so I proposed, a quite systematic refluence to the beginning of a poem (Brooke's 'The Old Vicarage, Grantchester'), of a long poem (*The Canterbury Tales*), of a book of poetry (*Les Fleurs du Mal*), of a narrative (*Heart of Darkness*), of a play (*The Spanish Tragedy*), of an opera (*Tristan and Isolde*), of a prophecy (Ezechiel); to the beginning of English poetry (Chaucer), of poetry itself (the Sybil), of literature (a Veda), of Indo-European language (Sanskrit). It presses back to the 'sylvan scene' of origin (l. 98) as quoted from *Paradise Lost* (IV 140), only to lose it in the fact that the person gazing on Eden there is Satan, who is about to destroy it. *Four Quartets* acts no less through quotations; it is equally intent on searching the beginnings of works; it probes even more explicitly for the Beginning.

Consider the works it uses. Like *The Waste Land*, it calls up the opening paragraphs of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, in the first lines of 'East Coker' III ('They all go into the dark'). In the same passage it quotes from the first speech of Milton's *Samson Agonistes* ('O dark dark dark'), while another adversary, Shelley, is present via the opening section of 'Ode to the West Wind', in the 'dead leaves' blown by the wind in 'Little Gidding' II and in the description of time as both 'destroyer' and 'preserver' in 'Dry Salvages' II. (Milton also enters through his own beginning as a poet, the ode 'On the Morning of Christ's Nativity'. The ode has left several traces, one of which is the 'bedded axle-tree' on only the second page of 'Burnt Norton'. In stanza VII of the ode's 'Hymn', the sun withdraws at

the appearance of a greater sun which its 'burning axle-tree' cannot bear; in Eliot, Jesus himself is the axle-tree, the still point of the turning world, and I am not sure that anyone has noticed the pun on the 'bedded' Christ-child.) The works of which Eliot approves mightily are likewise quoted in their beginnings. It is the initial figure of *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* of St John of the Cross which is translated at the end of 'East Coker' III: 'You must go by a way wherein there is no ecstasy . . .' It is the first two lines of Dante's *Commedia* which provide a way of describing the menacing experience of 'East Coker' II: 'In the middle, not only in the middle of the way / But all the way, in a dark wood', and its loaded return in V: 'So here I am, in the middle way'. Even works whose intervention is of minor importance may enter through their beginning. The opening of 'Little Gidding' III:

> There are three conditions which often look alike
> Yet differ completely, flourish in the same hedgerow

seems to derive from the first lines of Raleigh's sonnet addressed to his son:

> Three things there be that prosper up apace
> And flourish, whilst they grow asunder far.

Raleigh's warning, about the young man's avoiding the gallows, follows immediately upon the advice given by the 'familiar, compound ghost', and provides a further instance of a relationship between elder and junior.

There is another work, however, whose beginning is of greater significance, and whose presence creates yet another link with *The Waste Land*. The beginning of *Four Quartets* is alive with beginnings. Even the first epigraph quotes from only the second of Heraclitus' fragments in Diels' edition (that Eliot should have gone to a pre-Socratic itself speaks of a desire for origin), while the opening of the poem travels to the beginning of *Alice in Wonderland*, of Donne's 'The Extasie' (for the 'eyebeam' which crosses), and, pre-eminently, of *The Romaunt of the Rose*. I suppose it must be a coincidence that the beginning of the *Romaunt* is also much concerned with time, from line 369, and even with 'thre tymes' (l. 380); these are not times present, past and future, and the thinking about time is quite different. Yet when Eliot evokes a 'passage' which we did not take

towards a 'door' we never opened into a 'rose-garden', is he not following Chaucer through the 'passage' (l. 502), the 'dore' (531), by which the 'I' in Fragment A does pass so as to enter the most famous rose-garden of them all? In both gardens there is birdsong, from 'thrustles' (l. 665), among others, or a 'thrush'; both gardens resemble the 'paradys erthly' (l. 648) or 'our first world'.

Like Prufrock, Chaucer's narrator seems to hear 'Song of mermaydens of the see' (l. 680): the first poem in Eliot's *Collected Poems* also returns to origin in the *Romaunt*. But it is the relation to *The Waste Land* that is most revealing. *The Waste Land* opens with a distorted quotation from the first line of *The Canterbury Tales*, which enables Eliot to return to the beginning of English poetry as part of a troubled pursuit of origin, and with a view to embracing the history of poetry in a flurry of quotations which mainly incapacitate it. *Four Quartets* goes even further back, to an earlier work of 'the father of English poetry', for an embrace no longer sarcastic but reconciliatory; in which light, even the fact that the *Romaunt* is a translation takes on significance. Yet *Four Quartets* too disturbs origin, for like the 'sylvan scene' of *The Waste Land* its garden is flawed, or rather, it is not true Eden. What Eliot follows, into the rose-garden of the *Romaunt*, is the 'deception of the thrush'; he follows, one might say, the perilous but also, in this case, cautionary polysemy of words in a fallen language, since the 'deception' by which we are tempted is also a 'disappointing', from the French, and a 'taking', from the Latin.

(Who would have thought of bringing H. G. Wells into a discussion of Eliot? His story, 'The Door in the Wall', first published in 1906, tells of going, and of not going, down a passage and through a door into an enchanted garden. The garden occurs as a childhood experience – as it happens, in Eliot's own West Kensington – and exists essentially in memory. The subject of the story enters it once, continually remembers it as a place to save one from the 'vanity' and 'toilsome futilities' of ordinary life, and only returns there, perhaps most significantly for Eliot, at the moment of his death. The garden, unlike Eliot's, is an undemanding vision of bliss, yet it does seem to have left an impression. It has the further interest of including, if not three white leopards, two panthers, who play with the child, as well as a tall, fair girl and a sombre dark woman who shows him his life; and so of having worked its way into the beasts and the Lady of *Ash-Wednesday*.)

By means of the *Romaunt*, Eliot returns, or aims to return, to a

garden at the beginning of the world and a poem at the beginning of our poetry. And it is the sense of a beginning, even more than the sense of an ending, that bedevils writing, or that haunts it like a possibly holy ghost. I have discussed Milton's haunting in *Paradise Lost*, but there is more to be said of that poem's opening, which reaches time and again for what is *first*: for man's 'first' disobedience (line 1), for Moses who 'first taught the chosen seed' (8), and especially for the Spirit, who was present absolutely 'from the first' (19) and who is twice asked, as Muse, to 'say first' (27, 28) the matter which stands just prior to the human condition as we know it, the 'cause', that is, which moved our 'grand parents' to fall. The Spirit will even say who 'first' moved them (33). Yet while Milton can imagine these beginnings, and can even come to see himself (as I proposed in a chapter on Milton in *Poetry and Possibility*) as a primal darkness over which creativity hovers, he may only hope to involve the Spirit truly in the one beginning which he can know himself: the opening of his poem. The rest of the work will be a troubled remounting, in the knowledge of loss, to the now perilous origin of things, for the sake of now, for the sake of the world that in the final lines is 'all before' us.

Pope's re-working of *Paradise Lost*, *The Dunciad*, also remounts to the 'eldest time', but this turns out to be the reign of Dulness, daughter of Milton's 'Chaos and eternal Night' (I 9–12). Far from being the origin of writing, it is on the contrary a time 'e'er mortals writ or read' (line 9), a time most terrible to poets and one which triumphs, in fact, at the end of the poem, when language is annihilated along with everything else in the Satanic paradox of an 'uncreating word' (IV 654). (In the first version, Pope's opening was laid over Milton's more closely. It began with a 'first' out of Virgil: 'Books and the Man I sing, the first . . .', and it asked the 'cause' of the succession of dunces.) *The Dunciad* is less a mock-epic than a reversed epic. It discomposes, where the ending of the *Odyssey* composes. It undoes the *Aeneid* by destroying rather than founding a nation. It subverts the *Metamorphoses* by returning to Chaos. It peels back the opening verses of *Genesis*. It is the demonic parody of a return to origin, which decreates light and the word so as to recover the formless, the void. As a *Darkness Regained*, it is a kind of final nightmare about origin: lurid, melodramatic, comic.

As I have said of two more of our epics: Wordsworth's *Prelude* enacts a Romantic entry into, and exclusion from, the Beginning, while *The Waste Land* is thoroughly Modernist in its inability not only

to penetrate beginning but to undertake its own beginning; it can only get under way by laying out phrases from Malory, Petronius, Dante, the Book of Common Prayer, Chaucer. In the opening of *Four Quartets* footfalls likewise 'echo in the memory', and it seems that Romantic anxieties return. The passage through deception occurs in 'autumn heat'; for Wordsworth too it had occurred in the 'warmth' of 'autumn' (lines 65–6). More pointedly, Eliot's deceiving thrush is a reminiscence of Keats's nightingale, who calls to the poet like fancy, a 'deceiving elf'. Listen to the movement of their verse:

> Adieu! adieu! Thy plaintive anthem fades
> Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
> Up the hill-side . . .
>
> Quick, said the bird, find them, find them,
> Round the corner. Through the first gate,
> Into our first world . . .

This is the last re-writing that I know of Keats's hugely seminal ode. Eliot mimes Keats's acceptance of loss and departure for a movement of illusory approach and discovery; 'our' first world is an origin we have not known, though we seem to remember it from childhood, and a cloud in a garden of dead leaves suffices to remove the light of origin, the primal waters, and what they reflect. For the poem works against nostalgia ('Go, go, go'), and continually traps the reader into 'now' as the only acceptable time. It certainly quests for Eden. When 'Little Gidding', which is the poem's end, comes to 'the world's end' (I), what it finds there are 'the source of the longest river' – the river, presumably, of Genesis 1: 10, which 'went out of Eden to water the garden' before dividing into four – and the 'voice of the hidden waterfall', where the Fall is equally hidden in 'waterfall'. It also finds the rose, which is Dante's tree of life, and which resumes the Yggdrasill of the bedded axle-tree and the 'rank ailanthus' of 'Dry Salvages' I, a tree from Eliot's Missouri childhood but also 'tree of the gods' or 'tree of heaven'.

Yet the quest within the world is for the world. It is the biblical quest, for 'new heavens and a new earth', or, in the terms of 'Burnt Norton' II, for 'both a new world / And the old made explicit': for a world utterly changed and yet still itself. *Four Quartets* is a poem of the earth; even its grace, in that same section of 'Burnt Norton',

is 'a grace of sense'. So its ending looks to a future when we shall 'arrive where we started / And know the place for the first time', by passing through 'the unknown, remembered gate', when 'the last of earth left to discover / Is that which was the beginning'. One needs to listen so slowly to each of the phrases. What could it be to 'know the place', and to experience, at last, a 'first time'? What are these hints of death, and why are they associated with memory and glimpsed with joy? On our thoroughly explored planet, is it the earth itself which remains to be found: the earth as it was, as it ought to be and will be? The phrases fold back on themselves, and one is drawn into a present where future and past magically converge. Is there in all literature a more exact and quiet apprehending of what revelation might be, a revelation which, rather than disclosing another world, would illumine this one beyond what one can conceive, as an act of Imagination enabling one, at last, to enter the real?

One sees that the poet is proceeding through the 'searching self'. What beginning is of importance for the self? Here is one of the rarest and most profound moments of the poem:

> I am here
> Or there, or elsewhere. In my beginning.
> ('East Coker' I)

And here is a later one:

> (And the time of death is every moment)
> ('The Dry Salvages' III)

The beginning we need, and the only beginning we may have, is *now*: a present-ness which cannot be grasped, an experience open on all sides, and a passing through death.

For the underlying search is not for beginning but for a new beginning. So there are yet more works to whose beginnings *Four Quartets* returns, and if it goes, continually, to the beginning of beginnings in Genesis, often to be repulsed (by 'Adam's curse' in 'East Coker' IV, or the 'bitter apple' of 'Dry Salvages' II), it also goes to the beginning of Luke's gospel for the Annunciation ('Dry Salvages' II), which is the beginning of Jesus and of new life, and to the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles for Pentecost, which is the beginning of the Spirit and of new speech.

Pentecost emerges in the opening of 'Little Gidding', which also recovers yet another beginning, that of *Piers Plowman.* In verse intent on stress and alliteration, someone sets off on a religious journey. The connection was even clearer in the earlier version of the first line, with its mention of a 'summer . . . season', a suggestion, incidentally, from a still further beginning, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's 'The Lost Bower', whose tenth line refers to a 'Summer-snow of apple blossoms'. To continue this multiplication of tangents: as one reads the first section of 'Little Gidding', with its lithe and varied handling of the metre, one might reflect that Eliot, the most radical poet of his half-century, also managed to master both of the central poetic lines in English, the four-stress line of the Anglo-Saxon and Middle-English period which ends in Langland, and the iambic pentameter of the modern period which begins with Chaucer.

Even Pentecost, however, remains at a distance. Midwinter spring is said to contain 'pentecostal fire', like the tongues of fire with which the Spirit descended on the apostles in Acts, chapter 2, but there is 'no wind' to correspond to the 'rushing mighty wind' which accompanied that descent, and, according to what was an afterthought, the human spirit which observes the scene remains 'dumb'. The second reference is fully assertive: 'the communication / Of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language of the living', but before one of the dead can appear and speak in the second section, the Spirit passes in the guise of an enemy aircraft, a 'dark dove' with a 'flickering tongue', and the wind merely blows 'metal leaves' and the ghost himself. The dove descends again in the fourth section, but only to break 'the air / With flame of incandescent terror'. As everywhere, there is pain, the need for repentance, and imperfection for the time being. There *is* a reversal, of course, of the Babel of *The Waste Land,* which is also a kind of parody-Pentecost: a speaking in tongues which leads, not to universal understanding but to baffled incomprehension, and which sounds, indeed, especially in the final lines, rather like the drunkenness of which the disciples themselves were accused. When this is replaced, however, in the final lines of the *Quartets,* by an in-folding of the tongues of flame, one knows that this consummation is not for now; it does not occur in *Four Quartets* – there is no such thing as a Pentecostal poem; it is deferred to a 'when' beyond the end of the world.

* * *

Instead of following *The Waste Land* desperately towards the now impenetrable origin of language and of writing, *Four Quartets* goes to the origin of new language at Pentecost. Its other way of dealing with the earlier work's dismay about writing, in what constitutes a further re-working of it, is to engage once again with Ecclesiastes.

It is worth recalling that Ecclesiastes, with its insistent refrain, 'vanity of vanities; all is vanity', and its string of quotable, unflattering remarks on the human condition, has always proved attractive. It has entered English literature through a number of titles, some of them recent (*Many Inventions*, *The Golden Bowl*, *The Sun Also Rises*), and, more importantly, it has provided an atmosphere, a vocabulary, for works as disparate as Johnson's 'The Vanity of Human Wishes' and, I suppose, the whole *oeuvre* of Beckett. (*Murphy*, for example, opens with a Beckettian recasting of one of the famous phrases: 'The sun shone, having no alternative, on the nothing new'.) The power of Ecclesiastes is surely that, while everywhere acknowledging a just, bountiful and transcendent God, it describes a fallen world and leaves one in it. It says, unswervingly, what the facts are, and so it can be taken by the Christian for a hard and truthful look at the *miseria* of the world, which remains and is not to be simply spirited away by faith; and by the atheist, the agnostic, after the ablation of some of its parts, as saying what he too thinks in the starkest way possible. Its place in the structure of Christian thought is shown by the fact that St Paul, when describing the condition of the world that we experience since the Fall (Romans 8: 20), goes to the Greek translation of Ecclesiastes for the word that he wants: *mataiotēs*, 'vanity'.

The work held Eliot's imagination before he was converted, to the extent that the statement: 'he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow' (1: 18) might stand as an epigraph to his early poems, and to the extent that a Dantean reference to 'nostra vanitate' does stand in the epigraph to his first book. It continued to speak to him, after his conversion, of a reality not to be ignored. Is it an exaggeration to think that the first of his *Collected Poems* was actually written under the sign of Ecclesiastes? We know that the two paragraphs in 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' beginning: 'And indeed there will be time', rely on the third chapter's similar iteration of *time*, and one sees that Prufrock's most startling instance: 'There will be time to murder and create', is a sensational version of verse 3: 'A time to kill, and a time to

heal'. The next series of paragraphs: 'For I have known them all already, known them all', returns to the thought of Ecclesiastes 1: 9: 'The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done'. (The thought will reappear in the foretelling and foresuffering of Tiresias.) The paragraphs which open with: 'And would it have been worth it, after all', recall the Preacher's repeated question: 'What profit hath a man of all his labour?' (1: 3). The *spleen* and *ennui* of the nineteenth century are present, certainly, but through them Eliot homes, throughout the long middle of his poem, to the Old Testament work that maybe subtends them.

Later poems remember in particular the twelfth and last chapter. It leads one into and out of *The Waste Land*, with far more allusions than the single one which Eliot indicates in the Notes. The 'burden of the grasshopper' in *Ash-Wednesday* II is a punning quotation of verse 5: 'the grasshopper shall be a burden'. The same verse returns in Harry's 'Let the cricket chirp' in *The Family Reunion* (Part II, scene II). *Murder in the Cathedral* quotes liberally from verse 4, in the Third Priest's third speech in Part I:

> For who knows the end of good and evil?
> Until the grinders cease
> And the door shall be shut in the street,
> And all the daughters of music shall be brought low.

That this chapter of Ecclesiastes should have exercised Eliot in work after work is particularly interesting when one realises the significance of one of its unquoted phrases: 'of making many books there is no end', for the anguish of *The Waste Land*. The phrase is equally relevant to *Four Quartets*, which also returns to that last chapter.

Indeed, *Four Quartets* takes on itself, like 'Prufrock', the burden of Ecclesiastes. As Denis Donoghue has indicated, it is often a meditation on *vanitas vanitatum*.[49] The passage on time is used again in 'East Coker' I ('there is a time for building / And a time for living'), and with no abatement of austerity. On the contrary: while 'Eating and drinking' and 'mirth' also refer to Ecclesiastes' other refrain: 'to eat, and to drink, and to be merry' (8: 15), the final 'time' – 'of the coupling of man and woman / And that of beasts' – is a restatement, made terse by ellipsis and lineation, of the Preacher's comment about 'the estate of the sons of men . . . that

they might see that they themselves are beasts' (3: 18). The horror of endlessness in the Preacher's lament: 'yet is there no end of all his labour' (4: 8), is actually expanded in the Preacher-like dirge of 'Dry Salvages' II, which asks repeatedly 'Where is there an end of it . . . ?' and replies 'There is no end, but addition'. The phrase drives one back into the desolation of *The Waste Land*, as also forward into Beckett, before the poetry finally opens to a vision of the protracted series being interrupted from without, by the Annunciation. The Preacher's description of the sources of his work: 'my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge. And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit' (1: 16–17), directs the rising urgency of the meditation at the end of 'East Coker' II: its concern for the limited value of 'the knowledge derived from experience', and its derision of 'the wisdom of old men' or rather of 'their folly'. Even the Preacher's conclusion about death: 'All go into one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again' (3: 20, where 'all' actually refers to men and animals), is audible in 'East Coker' III: 'They all go into the dark, . . . the vacant into the vacant'.

It would be a relief at this point, I know, to leave the accumulating of details and enter a less encumbered discussion. There are, however, more, and they are telling because they show that Eliot was thinking of Ecclesiastes at the beginning of *Four Quartets* and at the end of all four of its constituent poems. His beginning goes to the beginning of Ecclesiastes, to verse 9: 'The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be', and, as Raymond Preston pointed out, to its reprise in 3: 15.[50] One could write out the Preacher's words there in Eliotic verse:

> That which hath been is now
> And that which is to be has already been,
> And God requires that which is past.

Or:

> Time past is time present
> And time future contained in time past.
> Time past must be redeemed.

(Preston also argued that the idea of following a bird which calls

'Quick' relates to Ecclesiastes 12:4: 'he shall rise up at the voice of the bird', and it is true that the notations are preceded by a door left unopened or doors that are shut.)

Ecclesiastes is the very first work alluded to in *Four Quartets*, after the epigraphs. It also provides the concluding thought of 'Burnt Norton': 'Ridiculous the sad waste time / Stretching before and after', where 'waste' seems to refer to Eliot's most famous poem and to place it in the world from which 'Burnt Norton' seeks to recover. The ending of 'East Coker' returns once more to the passage on time: 'There is a time for the evening under starlight, / A time for the evening under lamplight'; while our 'temporal reversion' to the 'soil' in the last lines of 'The Dry Salvages' recalls, among other biblical passages, a verse from the last chapter: 'Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was'. And if the beginning of *Four Quartets* goes to the beginning of Ecclesiastes, its end goes to the end. For it is said later in the last chapter that the Preacher 'sought out, and set in order many proverbs' – a statement recalled and twisted at the end of *The Waste Land* – and that he 'sought to find out acceptable words: and that which was written was upright'. The final section of 'Little Gidding' recalls and modifies this in its vision of a writing where 'every phrase / And sentence . . . is right (where every word is at home . . .)'.

It is this contrast between *The Waste Land* and *Four Quartets* that shows what Eliot is doing. As *Four Quartets* looks to overcome *The Waste Land*'s unease about time, the past, history, by its opening to Incarnation, so it looks to overcome the earlier work's unease about writing by its own writing practice. As I said, it is just as full of other men's works, and the past of literature is quite as much its theme. 'My words echo', says its first page, and 'Other echoes / Inhabit the garden'. They do indeed, often as no-longer-modern verse forms: isn't this part of the point, in fact, of those imitations of earlier 'poetical fashions'? But one needs to consider Eliot's first notes for the opening of 'East Coker' V:

20 years
l'entre 2 guerres
20 yrs. or 600 upwards.

He is clearly comparing his own twenty years 'largely wasted' with the whole history of English poetry from Chaucer. We cannot tell how he would have developed the idea, but it is tempting to read

all those centuries of poetry into the lines that he did write, about 'Trying to learn to use words, and every attempt / Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure'. He in no way loses his concern about writings of the past, but his perspective changes. For he recognises in the lines which follow that what one is looking for 'has already been discovered' by men 'whom one cannot hope / To emulate – but there is no competition'. Competition was not the problem, it is true, in *The Waste Land*, but the sheer existence of so many predecessors was, whereas they are greeted here with acknowledgement and humility: the one thing, one remembers from the second section, whose 'endlessness' is acceptable.

'Little Gidding' is where the work is done. As the fourth of the poems, it reminds the reader once more that *Four Quartets* itself continually begins anew, with 'a wholly new start', because one is only ever beginning. This is a sorrow, but also an opportunity. So its opening picks up yet again the opening of *The Waste Land*. There, April 'stirs' dull roots; here (as a significant afterthought) another kind of spring 'stirs' the dumb spirit. Most importantly, its second section is an essential re-writing of *The Waste Land*, of an astonishing precision and inventiveness. When the narrator, walking in the streets of the unreal city, encounters not Stetson but a 'familiar, compound ghost', he meets, one knows, with recession on recession of other writers: with Yeats, Pound, Eliot himself, Poe, Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Laforgue, Donne, Milton, Shelley, Virgil, Dante, Ford, Swift, Johnson ('The Vanity of Human Wishes', in fact), Sir Thomas Browne, Tourneur, Kipling, Tennyson, Arnold, James, Shakespeare, and who knows how many more. It is a miniature *Waste Land* of allusions, and the opening does begin with an inspiration, by 'dove' and 'wind', which is troubled and fearful. Yet this is not the cruel inspiration of *The Waste Land*, and, the ghost once met, the two figures become 'compliant to the common wind': to the inspiration, that is, which blows on all poets. Instead of *The Waste Land*'s anxiety about the teeming multiplicity of writers, there is an acceptance of them all, friend and foe alike. No longer the stuff of nightmare, no longer 'heaped together' paradoxically, they are admitted and reconciled for a new act of writing. As I suggested in the chapter on *Renga* in *Towards a Christian Poetics*, his precursors help Eliot to compose his lines while Eliot enables them, reciprocally, to 'find words' they 'never thought to speak'. Whereas the final, polyglot strafe of quotations in *The Waste Land* is a showing of the 'many books' –

there they are in their most obvious disarray – the verse here gathers the scattered works and voices; as a small sign, perhaps, of the gathering of the 'scattered quires', as described at the end of the *Paradiso*, into 'one volume'.

Isn't it strange that critics relate the quotation procedure of *The Waste Land* to the idea of tradition in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent'? The essay talks of poetry as 'a living whole of all the poetry that has ever been written'; the poem suffers invasion by an exorbitance of books. The essay sees tradition as something by which a poet might place himself; the poem sees a litter of writers wherever it looks. Only by the time of *Four Quartets* had Eliot found a way, as poet, of coming to terms with his own idea, in a move which is also a startling transformation of neoclassicism.

It could have been bland – and it will be bland to anyone who is suspicious of this kind of reconciliation. The passage closes, for all that, where it begins, in dread. Before leaving him in 'the disfigured street', a street both bombed and bereft of the figurative, the ghost discloses to the speaker the 'gifts reserved for age'. While he draws, moreover, on Milton, Swift, Johnson, Yeats, he also draws on Ecclesiastes. Compare 'the cold friction of expiring sense' with 'desire shall fail' (12: 5); 'laughter at what ceases to amuse' with 'thou shalt say, I have no pleasure' (12: 1); and the insistence on 'human folly' and 'fools' approval' with the Preacher's motif of the fool. The 'master' of 'Little Gidding' II concludes by counselling his disciple regarding age; the Preacher counsels his son to take heed in his youth, before 'the years draw nigh' (12: 1). The master reveals the 'exasperation' for the spirit of a man unless he is 'restored by that refining fire'; the Preacher passes across an unstated 'unless' to his own final advice, to fear God and keep his commandments (12: 13).

In the very passage where Eliot seeks to repel his earlier distress at the 'making of many books', he actually returns to Ecclesiastes, to hear the Preacher's deeper distress, as voiced in the just preceding verses, about age and end. As if to reinforce the point, 'Little Gidding' is precisely the quartet where, earlier in this same second section, the word 'vanity' at last occurs. One then looks back to the beginning of the passage, and one sees how severely it undercuts the Romantic rise towards morning of the first line: 'In the uncertain hour before the morning', by its paradoxical restatement in the second: 'Near the ending of interminable night' (which could mean that night only *seemed* interminable), and by

another, unanswerable restatement, a perfect adynaton, in the third: 'At the recurrent end of the unending'. One might then reflect that even this passage of confident, consummate, writing, falls under the judgement of the insidious phrase I quoted above: 'every attempt' is 'a different kind of failure'.

And the underlying theme here is, after all, death. It is not merely that the one thing uniting all the poets of the past is the fact that they are dead, though that thought in itself, in all its banality, can make one pause. Poetry is in contact with death, through its encounter with the mortality of the world to which it aspires and of the self which it actuates, as of the very language deployed for the encounter; and through its awareness that the death of the world and of the self is, in one way or another, its own origin. So Eliot descends, for the purpose of his poem, into Hell or Purgatory, and discovers that the self in creation is 'someone other' while nevertheless being 'still the same', and that when he cries he hears 'another's voice cry'. He realises, at last, the *othering* of the self, which is quite different from the de-centred self of *The Waste Land*, where, to quote from 'Portrait of a Lady', he must 'borrow every changing shape / To find expression', and where one can understand his later disparaging of the poem, however unjust, as a 'piece of rhythmical grumbling'. He achieves a kind of multipersonal utterance, which also differs from the de-centring of voice in *The Waste Land*, from its dispersal into a heterogeneity of voices, some of them barely comprehensible, a few of them the cries of birds.

For it is a ghost who speaks. It is arguable that the elegy, in its explicit concern for death, its clarifying of the failure of poetry's vocative desire, its ability to raise a new image, of 'Lycidas', of 'Adonais', out of loss, moves close to the source, to the sense, of poetry. *The Waste Land* throngs with the dead – it begins with their burial – and they, naturally, fail to speak. As soon as they begin they are cut off, deflected: 'Whan that Aprill . . . is the cruellest month', 'The . . . Chair she sat in'. Death is the silencing of voice, so the ultimate victory would be to locate voice within the dead themselves, and that is what 'Little Gidding' achieves, in the only way in which a poet can achieve it. It delivers, insofar as one ever could, 'the communication / Of the dead', which is 'beyond' the language of the living. It raises the dead for the composing of a communal poem, and is a new kind of elegy.

As the ghost speaks, he refers to speech; this poetry emerging

from death is thoroughly self-aware. But has enough attention been paid to the logic of his syntax? The 'since' of his opening: 'Since our concern was speech . . .' leads not to a main clause also concerned with language, but to this: 'Let me disclose the gifts reserved for age'. Speech impels one outside itself, to the moral and spiritual world of 'aftersight and foresight'. This sounds like a valediction, and it is. In the one passage in the poem where someone speaks, the bitter, self-knowing, admonitory voice is not the voice of Eliot (or of Milton, or Yeats), but the voice of bitterness, self-knowledge, admonition. And remarkably, having projected voice out there, having written in such a way as to utter the self by outering it – and having come to terms with beginning, made peace with the 'many books', and concluded his response to *The Waste Land* – Eliot stopped writing poems.

11

The World Could Not Contain the Books

In this final chapter I should like to move almost beyond the book by considering a work from the Bible. Part of the surprise of the fourth gospel, which has already illuminated the notion of self, is that it engages with all the matters which I have discussed, though it does so, of course, not strictly as a piece of literature but as an act of witness. Should we take it on anything like its own terms, we have to see it as different, in ways to be defined; and yet the more one reads it, the more evidently it is concerned with a whole range of questions which we think of as literary: with writing, and re-writing, and interpretation; with beginning and ending; with the place of the writer in the text; with the relations between narrative and history, story and persons, words and the Word. Anyone who doubts its claims may wish to argue that this presents the evangelist with problems, for his announcing of religious truth. Maybe the problems are rather for us. He seems in any case to have pushed further in these areas than other writers, even to the extent of providing a model for what occurs elsewhere, and the first thing to do, whatever one's beliefs, is to learn by following him carefully.

John's gospel begins, as one knows, in the beginning. So, for that matter, do the others. Matthew opens with a 'book of . . . generation' about Jesus according to the Authorised Version, or a 'table of . . . descent' according to the no-nonsense New English Bible, but what he offers in the Greek is a 'book of genesis'. He repeats exactly the initial words of the second creation story in Genesis 2: 4 (and the reprise at 5: 1) as translated in the Septuagint. Since his gospel has been placed first, a book of genesis ushers in the New Testament – the narrative of the new creation – as it does the Old. His serial use of the word *egennēsen* ('Abraham *begat* Isaac; and Isaac *begat* Jacob', etc.) also recalls the series of *egeneto* ('and *there was* light', 'and *it was* so') in the first creation story of Genesis 1. Mark's first word is *Archē*, as in Genesis, and his opening phrase: 'The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God', may

be an interpretative expansion of the opening phrase of Genesis: 'In the beginning . . . God'. Even Luke begins with a reference to those who were with Jesus 'from the beginning' (*ap' archēs*), though his description of them as 'eyewitnesses . . . of the word' (*tou logou*) can only resonate when we have read John.

Matthew and Mark may well have already related the *genesis* or the *archē* to Jesus. John does so more famously, and also more comprehensively. His exordium: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God', is a more daring intervention than Mark's in the Greek text of Genesis, since it explains God's 'saying' the world ('God said, Let there be light', etc.) in terms of the Word of God and thence of the man Jesus. Yet this is only the start of John's quest for origin. He also returns to the very first act of creation: 'Let there be light', so as to suggest that there too Jesus was present, since 'In him was . . . the light' (1: 4). As the Word was within the saying, so the Light was within the light; as its source, perhaps, as the 'true light' (verse 9) of which physical light is a sign. And in a different way he returns, surely, to the Spirit. In Genesis 1: 2, the *pneuma*, that is, the Spirit, or wind, or breath, of God, moves over the water; in John 1: 32–3, the *pneuma* descends and remains on Jesus as he is being baptised in water. It even does so 'like a dove', possibly as a reminiscence of the same phrase added to Genesis 1: 2 in Jewish tradition.

As soon as he commences writing, John reaches for the language of the commencement, for the light of origin, for the Spirit hovering over genesis. He travels to the beginning of the world, to the moment, incidentally, when, by a triumphant grasping of a rule in Greek grammar which requires a neuter plural to govern a singular verb, he can say that the original multiplicity was a unity, that *Panta . . . egeneto*, 'all things was made'. And he also travels to the beginning of the scriptures; as writer, he makes contact with the beginning of 'the writings'. To penetrate to the world and the word of the beginning is a desire from which we find it difficult to escape. It haunts poetry in particular, and it roves, as I have been saying, through some of our greatest poems, through *Paradise Lost, The Prelude, The Waste Land*. It is always frustrated, and the vanity of our condition is nowhere more evident than in the distance between John re-writing and creatively interpreting the beginning of the Hebrew Bible and Eliot re-writing the beginning of *The Canterbury Tales*, likewise at the beginning of his own work, only to distort it. Of course, John may not literally return to genesis and

deny history, but his confidence to go there in words comes surely from his realisation that he has known the Beginning as a person. He has heard the Word, he has seen the light of origin, he has touched the source of 'all things'; he has received the Spirit. It is not even a question of rediscovering Eden, for in the company of Jesus he has voyaged beyond.

Even he, however, cannot sustain the beginning, any more than could the writer of Genesis, and he too enacts the Fall. In Genesis one is surprised by the speed with which one is hurried from creation and the garden to the act of disobedience: the loss of origin takes just over two chapters. In John's gospel it takes five verses, for the reference to the primal light in the Word is followed immediately by: 'And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not' (*AV*), or 'has never mastered it' (*NEB*). The darkness into which the Genesis light now shines is evidently, as the succeeding verses show, that of a fallen world, and John returns quite vertiginously to our present experience, to reveal the condition of ignorance and ill will from which we are obliged to consider the flawless beginning. He is also making clear, or rather, he presumably takes for granted, that his writing, however (as we might say) self-conscious and powerfully imaginative, is impelled by an urgency which is spiritual. For the conflict between light and darkness is not a poetic vision to be contemplated but an activity in which we are involved. The gospel will continually recur to it – in Jesus' words, for instance: 'I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness' (12: 46) – as to a matter of choice, of life, and death.

And doesn't he present Jesus as actually offering the beginning, as coming from origin and making origin available here and now? It is not only that everything Jesus says is words from the Word, though that in itself is no small affair. He also brings the light of Genesis, and the Spirit. And one can go further: what he offers – himself – is in excess of the beginning. To know the Word is more than to hear God's words or to live in a world said by him. To see the Light is better than to see light, since a more intense 'light has come into the world' (3: 19) than came originally, so as to illumine the earth. By stressing Jesus' declaration: 'I am the light of the world' (8: 12) on the first word, one marks his relation to the initial light, and one learns how and where to look. Similarly, when Jesus after the resurrection 'breathed on' the disciples (*enephusēsen*) for them to receive the Spirit (20: 22), he was clearly recalling the

action of God in Genesis when, having formed the man from the dust of the ground, he 'breathed into' his nostrils (*enephusēsen*) so as to make him a living creature (2: 7); yet to be regenerated is greater than to be generated, and the disciples are given far more than was given to Adam.

At the end of his gospel, as at the beginning, John sweeps the reader back into Genesis. But the movement is not retrogressive and nostalgic. The act of re-writing is also an act of transformation, which corresponds to the ternary movement of the world: from creation to fall to a more splendid re-creation; from birth to death to a profounder rebirth. In *The Great Code*, Northrop Frye claims that the 'entire Bible, viewed as a "divine comedy", is contained within a U-shaped story . . . one in which man . . . loses the tree and water of life at the beginning of Genesis and gets them back at the end of Revelation' (page 169). But it is not merely a question of 'getting back' to where we were, after all that labour and sacrifice. The end is more than the beginning, and after the fall the rise is higher. A graphic representation of it would be not a U but something like this: √. The shape of things, and the shape of literature in both its comic and, I would argue, its tragic dimensions, is a tick; which comes as quite a surprise, but seems strangely, laughingly, appropriate.

* * *

John's story is longer than those of the other evangelists, since it begins even earlier than Adam. As a narrative interpretation of history it is, of course, like theirs, exclusive, and one of its curious and defining features is that it makes persons in the real world the effects of narrative, and, specifically, of writing. In the case of Jesus this is to a certain extent obvious and familiar. He realises the Jesus-types of the Old Testament (Joshua, David, etc.), re-living and climaxing the stories of others, whose lives become thereby part of *his* story. As Messiah, he fulfils the Messianic prophecies. It is worth noticing, nevertheless, that both type and prophecy occur and are accomplished within the gospel itself. Lazarus is a type of Jesus through being a man who returns from the dead and emerges from a tomb. John seems careful to mention in both cases the cloth (*soudarion*) which binds the head (11: 44 and 20: 7). The cynical words of Caiaphas: 'it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people' (11: 50), are an unwitting

prophecy of Jesus' death and of its substitutionary meaning. Remarkably, the raising of Lazarus and the high priest's prophecy take place within a few verses of each other, as if John, in modelling his narrative, is focusing attention on Jesus's role as the enactment or re-enactment of event and of statement. It is presumably no coincidence that the further focus is on death and resurrection, so that even more essential matters are also in view.

One can benefit by looking closely, even now, at the continual references to Jesus as a man 'written about' (1: 45). And think of the way in which John the Baptist first alludes to him. He does not say, 'He that cometh after me is preferred before me', but, 'This is he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me' (1: 15). He uses the same formula fifteen verses later: 'This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me'. (This occurs on a 'next day' following a day which is unspecified: the gospel makes a series of quiet, breathtaking moves from God in the Beginning to the successiveness of our quotidian reality.) No prophecy is involved; it seems that the evangelist wishes to establish from the start, and quite ordinarily, that Jesus is preceded by words, and that when he appears he does so as a kind of incarnation of them.

I used the metaphor because it came to mind, but it is, of course, apt, since according to John Jesus *is* the Word, and the Word became flesh. This gives a quite other volume to the idea that words precede persons. For after all, John the Baptist too is an effect, as it were, of words. The first thing that anyone says to him in the gospel is, 'Who are you?' (1: 19), and having replied, to this most radical of questions, that he is not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor 'the prophet', he answers finally: 'I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness'. He is a quotation, from Isaiah 40 verse 3, the actualisation of a text; he *is* what has been written of him. He has been made, like 'all things', through the Word of God, but also in response to the human and, John would say, inspired words of an Old Testament writer.

He is also someone who occurs in a story. I suggested in *Towards a Christian Poetics* (as I mentioned in the chapter on 'History') that to figure in a story is a fundamental desire: to see one's life, that is, as teleologically shaped, by another hand or one's own, so that its beginning, middle and end form into significance; and that many narratives present even their characters as being aware of the desire. I cited, among others, Malory's *Tale of the Sankgreal,*

where the knights, in seeking 'adventures', are looking to be gathered into a story-world, and Sartre's *La Nausée*, where Roquentin attempts to become 'the hero of a novel' in despair of a world 'unnecessary' and godless. John the Baptist is just such a hero, and knows it. His meaning derives from words given to others many generations before; his story, that of the 'precursor', pre-exists him. The evangelist clearly assumes that, at least in the case of certain elect individuals, who would also include Peter and himself, person derives from story as being follows from words. (One is reminded of Aristotle's assertion in chapter 6 of the *Poetics* about the precedence of plot over character.) John the Baptist is narrated by God, spoken by the Word.

Before thinking further about this preposterous notion (I use the word etymologically), one should consider that events too, no less than persons, are produced by writings and by words. Familiarity as well as scepticism make it difficult for us to be amazed at the assertion that, for example, hostility to Jesus comes about so that 'the word [the *logos*] might be fulfilled that is written' in the law (15: 25). The New English Bible here is rather loosened from the original Greek, but it does make the point with some vigour: 'this text . . . had to come true.' Whatever we think of it, a doctrine of prophecy involves words preceding events, and one remembers that for John, after all, the Word precedes everything. As God speaks things into being, so events occur, after a lapse of time, to fulfil their words. All the New Testament writers hold the doctrine, but John is the one who, through his vision of the pre-existing, creative Word, accounts for it most profoundly.

Perhaps this is why he so diversifies the play between word and event. He is very far from limiting himself to the classic case, where an event in Jesus's life is said to correspond to a text in the Old Testament. For instance, the text may be quoted before the event is recounted, as when Jesus recites a passage from Psalm 41 as referring to his betrayal (13: 18) in advance of Judas betraying him (chapter 18). Or the disciples fail to recognise the word in the event at the time, and only do so some while afterwards, as when Jesus rides into Jerusalem on an ass's colt 'as it is written' in Zechariah (12: 14–16). Above all, Jesus's own words are also shown to be fulfilled. He claims that if the Temple were destroyed he could raise it again in three days; after the resurrection the disciples realise that he was speaking of his body. They 'remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed . . . the word [the

logos] which Jesus had said' (2: 19–22). His words take on the status of a kind of spoken scripture. They are even fulfilled within the gospel itself, from one chapter to the next. In chapter 17 he prays: 'those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost' (verse 12); in chapter 18, when he himself is arrested but the disciples are allowed to go free, this is said to take place so that 'the saying [the *logos*] might be fulfilled, which he spake, Of them which thou gavest me I have lost none' (verse 9).

John is clearly organising history into a constraining literary form, whose inordinate ambition is to relate heaven to earth, then to now, generation to generation, lives to lives, things said on one day to things done on another. He saturates his text with finality and significance. He is also one of four writers doing this, each of them apparently summoning history to arrange itself according to a slightly different perspective. A natural response would be to conclude that they are groping around, or blithely ignoring, a non-verbal event, namely, the life of Jesus, and glossing it with their own private and extrinsic interpretations. Our job would be to struggle through the fables to the facts. However, the demonstration of the facts by the use of evidence according to proper method could never rise to the quite different level of the meaning of the facts. Empirical history can tell us what *happened*, but it cannot tell us, certainly not in this case, *what* happened. A more contemporary response would be that any event is already textual, always-already interpreted, so that the notion of a plain event unadorned with language and ideology is a mirage: beyond our hermeneutic scrutiny, literally nothing happened. The life of Jesus could only exist, or only be observed, in the glosses of the evangelists, and any meaning attaching to it would be that which their writing creates and bounds.

One might also take them at their word (though there is no argument that could persuade one to do so), in which case it becomes clear that they have already mastered the second view, and that the implication of history and story is not a discovery of modern narratology and historiography but a biblical commonplace. What distinguishes their doctrine, and makes it unacceptable to anything short of faith, is the assumption that history, or at least salvation-history, is already elaborated as narrative, by a more than human story-teller who writes events as humans write tales. John is not failing to report 'what actually happened' out of a preference for the telling of pious lies; nor is he unconcerned

with the correspondence between what he says and events outside what he says. He sees events as being in intricate relation with other events and with words, through typology and prophecy, and he structures his work so as to show the relations which he wishes to emphasise. We have no cause to be wary of his 'art', since his art is surely to perceive the relations and to declare them, much as John the Baptist, when saying of Jesus: 'Behold the Lamb of God' (1: 29, 36), is perceiving him as the antitype of the Old Testament sacrificial lamb. As John the Baptist has the assurance to by-pass a merely empirical report (say, 'Behold Jesus of Nazareth'), so John the evangelist can show relations to previous scenes and statements from the conviction that the relations actually exist.

The narrative plan, John might say, is God's, since God has plotted our salvation in a story-shaped history and history-shaped stories. And one sees that this sophisticated notion, in a work which constitutes a model for the closest relation of narrative to event, is actually quite familiar, and that the activity it describes goes by the name of providence. What gives John's gospel an extra hermeneutic depth, however, is precisely the fact that his theme is the Word. Jesus is the focus of a story which had been, in part, already told, in the Old Testament, and which is being continued as John writes it; but he occupies that position as the Word itself, as the source of the world and of language, as the creative centre from which both events and words derive, and in which they meet.

In certain other stories whose theme is partly story: the *Commedia*, *The Canterbury Tales*, *A la recherche du temps perdu*, the author's disclosure of himself is carefully placed and highly charged. As the author of a book about the fundamental story of history, John identifies himself not by name but, appropriately and movingly (21: 20 and elsewhere) as 'the disciple whom Jesus loved'.

* * *

The beginning of John's gospel is an explication of the opening of Genesis, and also much more. The ending too is full of writerly interest. There seem, in fact, to be no less than three endings. Chapter 20 closes with a reference to itself ('this book') and to what might have been written, and with an exhortation to the reader:

> And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book:
>
> But these (*tauta*) are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.

Chapter 21 reads like an afterthought, or an addition by someone else. It begins by attaching itself to the conclusion: 'After these things . . .' (*tauta*); recounts further actions of Jesus following the resurrection; and ends with a hint about hermeneutics, to which I shall return. Two final verses are appended, possibly by a third writer. It is as if the gospel does not need to finish – finishing is no problem – hence the exhilaration of the very last verse:

> And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written.

The writer, whoever he is, re-writes the ending of chapter 20 in a visionary leap which is so much more than the 'hyperbole' of the commentators. The gospel, like the synoptics, is already a crowded compendium of tales, which are encompassed, not in an epic, or a decameron, but in a short story of about forty pages. The tale of Nicodemus in chapter 3, so full of theological teaching and also of human and narrative suggestion, takes up at most some four hundred words. Biblical narrators in general are, of course, masters of brevity. The ending then opens to the possibility of a quasi-infinity of books. Isn't this the New Testament's reply to the ending of Ecclesiastes, to the verse, 'Of making many books there is no end', with which we began? As against that seeming curse of endlessness, that writer's sadness before the superflux of writings and the surfeit of the world, the conclusion of John's gospel imagines, on the contrary, the blessing of an endless number of books, all derived from a single life. It is the perfect response, and it can be made because the perspective has changed entirely, from that of the fallen world to that of the world redeemed, and because the writer is highly fortunate in his subject. At the origin of the world and of words is the Word himself, and the potential infinity of books is a function of the infinite Word. Here is Erasmus's *copia* with a vengeance.

If the *Essays* of Montaigne or *The Waste Land* are the epitome of the sorrow of the text, John's gospel is the epitome of the joy of the text. One contemplates it with longing. It is also, moreover, both finished and not finished, it closes without imposing closure, and this combination of completion and inexhaustibility, of fulfilment and possibility, is aesthetically, one may think, highly desirable. It also corresponds to the work of Jesus, which the gospel describes as likewise complete and yet incomplete. Many similar statements culminate in the famous cry from the cross: 'It is finished' (19: 30); yet the final verses concern unfinished business (the destinies, as we shall see, of Peter and of John himself), and the whole gospel, like the others, is presented as the culmination but also as the beginning of a story which is still in process, and whose further writing is to take place partly in the lives of its readers. The ending directs attention, first, to books, and thereby, as in Dante, or Malory, or Proust, to the book we have been reading, though not as an art-work but as a 'writing' to be believed and acted on. It equally directs attention to the world, which is shown as unable to contain the stories of Jesus, rather as it could not contain Jesus himself. The creation, in both cases, is too small for the Word, and the present world as a living-space is called into question.

* * *

One might almost conclude there, with the realisation of John's gospel as the work which resolves, for itself, the quandaries of literature. Even for someone who utterly rejects its pretension to truth, it remains the text to which literature aspires. It is literature's dream text, in all that concerns origin, story and history, the joy and plenteousness of writing. But the interest of the gospel continues; it takes one further and further into literary matters. As an act of witness it is also overtly an act of writing. It starts with a quotation, and its first words are a re-working of the first words of the Bible. It begins with the beginning, and it ends with an allusion to endlessness. It opens with the Word and closes with books. (In the Vulgate, *libros* is the final word.) And doesn't John's confidence as a writer, by which I mean in this connection, his willingness to bring his writing activity to the fore, derive precisely from the fact that the Word itself is his theme? In the Christian perspective, all writing, and indeed all life, are related to the Word,

and John is the writer who declares the fact and who, if one may put it this way, takes most advantage of it, and inspires his continuator or continuators to do likewise.

His text, moreover, is itself self-reflexive. I realise the danger of regarding John through our own half-lights, of grappling him to what interests us. We cannot know exactly how he conceived of himself as a writer, and it may just be that the writer most celebrated for having composed his words in the dimension of the Word was *less* self-aware than, say, Joyce, burlesquing the Word in *Ulysses*. That he saw no link between the *logos* and his own *logoi* is, however, hard to credit, and one can at least speculate that in writing 'In the beginning was the word' at the beginning of his own words, and without any distinguishing capital for 'word', he is thinking of his own beginning, reflecting on the primacy of the word in all that he is about to write, and sharing the excitement of going back to origin and finding there, at the source of all things and 'with God', the medium of his own craft.

John's gospel is the ultimate of all literary works, where language intends beyond itself. And even apart from any speculative psychology, the very text of the gospel reflects word against word. For one of its most evident yet still elusive features is the fact that Jesus himself is self-reflexive: the Word speaking words. In John's Greek version of his sayings, he sometimes speaks *rhēmata*, but the Logos also tells the disciples that the *logos* which they hear comes from the Father (14: 24), that they are clean by virtue of the *logos* which he has spoken to them (15: 3), that they must remember the *logos* which he has said (15: 20). The Logos claims himself to keep the *logos* of the Father (8: 55), and he brings the relation of word and Word to perfection in actually declaring to the Father, in the course of his prayer in chapter 17: 'thy *logos* is truth' (verse 17).

The word of God is ultimately the Word of God, and God's words are spoken by God's Word. His word is truth, and his Word is the way, the truth, and the life (14: 6). John's words too are written in that light, as he involves himself in the rather formidable business of putting words together. He also involves the reader, by making the vision marvellous but also uncomfortable, and by forcing one to realise just what is involved. For as we encounter the Word, we are also faced, continually, with Jesus's fierce and old-fashioned views about the scriptures. He even asks at one point: 'if ye believe not [Moses'] writings, how shall ye believe

my words?' (5: 47). This is constraining enough already, without the further thought that to be able to believe his words we also have to believe John's writings. Perhaps John has invented all this, and supplied Jesus with words that Jesus never spoke. And yet: is Jesus divine, or isn't he? Is he the Word, or not? So much follows from an affirmative reply, and the worldly-wise evasion of 'neither/nor' cannot be sustained and leads nowhere.

Jesus, moreover, really does do things with words. Words for John, a Hebrew, are more than means of communication, or instruments of self-expression. They are active, they are presences; they can 'clean' (15: 3), they can 'remain' in a person (5: 38), they can be 'kept' (e.g. 14: 24). They belong to the same world as his 'truth', which, far from being a Western abstraction, is something one 'does' and has for its opposite not only falsehood but the practice of 'evil' (3: 20–21). Jesus's words have the power of the Word: he commands Lazarus to come out of the tomb (11: 43) much as God creates light by saying it into existence. In the course of the first story told of him, the calling of the disciples, he changes Simon's name, less dramatically, to Peter, the Rock (1: 43). This suggests yet another re-writing of the opening of Genesis, since Adam's first action is to name the animals (2: 19), while the first action of the new Adam is to re-name a man: the Word is thereby associated with both the divine and the renewed human language. It also suggests that at the heart of the Word there is a delight in wordplay. And it leads to the second story, the marriage at Cana, where Jesus changes water into wine, not by pronouncing a magic formula but by telling servants, prosaically, to fill the jars and draw the liquid (2: 7–8). John's gospel, like the synoptics, presents Jesus as someone who changes the world (turning blind men into seeing men, for instance), and whose power of change is endless, a doorway to possibility (the multiplying of the loaves and fishes). By placing the transformation of the water soon after the transformation of a name, John is perhaps intimating the role of language itself in the Re-creation.

The words of Jesus are all referable to the Word: they brim with authority but also with mystery. Hence, no doubt, the number of times that John shows people puzzling over his words, and repeating them. Here, for example:

> Then said Jesus unto them, Yet a little while I am with you, and then I go unto him that sent me.

> Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me: and where I am, thither ye cannot come.
>
> Then said the Jews among themselves, Whither will he go, that we shall not find him? Will he go unto the dispersed among the Gentiles, and teach the Gentiles?
>
> What manner of saying [of *logos*] is this that he said, Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me: and where I am, thither ye cannot come?
>
> (7: 33–36)

Jesus reiterates his words in the next chapter, to the same response (8: 21–22), and then both reiterates and transforms them much later for the benefit of the disciples. They too respond by quoting him:

> Then said some of his disciples among themselves, What is this that he saith unto us, A little while and ye shall not see me: and again a little while and ye shall see me: and, Because I go to the Father?
>
> They said therefore, What is this that he saith, A little while? we cannot tell what he saith.
>
> (16: 17–18)

In *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, Robert Alter has remarked that the narrators of the Old Testament tend to avoid indirect speech, preferring to give the actual words spoken (page 67). This highlighting of logos finds its explanation in the nature of God and in the nature of Adam, and its greatest moment in these 'obstinate questionings', these repetitive broodings over the words of the Word.

The final brooding is by John himself, and it occurs at the end. Peter asks Jesus what will happen to 'the disciple whom Jesus loved' and is told: 'If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?' (21: 20–22). On the basis of this reply (this *logos*), says the evangelist, the rumour spread that the disciple would not die; 'yet', he continues, 'Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?' In repeating Jesus' exact words he is not issuing a scholarly caveat, I take it, in the manner of a modern historian. He is perfecting the shape of a narrative where, since the Word is beginning and end, *logos* is present in the first verse and the last. He is directing attention to

words at the close of a book about the Word, and drawing us into an awareness of their reverberation. And he is bringing to a head the series of allusions throughout the gospel to words being fulfilled in ways which had not been expected. His point, surely, is that a saying is not understood, and perhaps cannot be, until it is fulfilled. Indeed, he reinforces the thought by reporting another saying of Jesus in the immediately preceding verses. Peter had already been told his own future, in phrases which could not have been entirely perspicuous at the time: 'When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not' (verse 18). The saying can then be interpreted: 'This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God', because in this case the prophecy has already been realised and its significance revealed. The implications are clear: by the juxtaposition John hints that our interpretations of unfulfilled prophecy are subject to error – he provides an example of probable error – and that in the meantime, in a world made by the Word, we have words, and that we should adhere to them.

There is another detail here for the narrative pattern. John ends his gospel with the statement of a hermeneutic principle concerning unfulfilled words, having begun it by offering the interpretation of words which had been fulfilled, by taking the references in Genesis 1 to speech, to light and to spirit and applying them to Jesus. He begins with a retrospective truth and, after a final instance of this in the death of Peter, he ends with a prospective truth, which issues the reader out of the book and into the world. It is a world poised, like the conclusion of the gospel, between the Resurrection and the final End: the world of the meantime.

It is in this world that we confront the hermeneutic problem. In a fallen world meaning cannot be taken for granted; we look for a truth that is self-evident, or at least finally clear, but what we see is the filtering of the twilights, the coruscations of Hermes. A youngish man is crucified (if he was), along with hundreds of others, and the New Testament writers try to make something of it. John in particular, in alleging that he was the Word, spins out a discourse of great complexity around a series of utterances purporting to be divine. If the event really does have the significance which the writers assign to it, it cannot be merely an instance of the problem: it displays and centres the problem, and shows why

it exists. The crucial meanings will demand something more than openness, perseverance, honesty, and that something, or so the argument goes, is not exactly in our control, since it is faith, grace. John's is the gospel, in fact, where Jesus is presented, especially in chapter 6, as having disconcerting views of the matter. His parables also involve his hearers notoriously in not understanding him, in being deliberately excluded from meaning: as in Mark (4: 11–12) and Luke (8: 10), he speaks to the crowd in dark sayings for the express purpose of preventing them from seeing the truth and being converted (12: 39–40). They are not ready for him, or he is not ready for them, and they can only make themselves available to his teaching by a complete change of heart. (It is a pity that Frank Kermode should have assumed, in *The Genesis of Secrecy*, that the exclusion is permanent, as if the blinded cannot be given sight.) As a method of persuasion, this is precisely not what we are expecting.

The first thing Jesus says in the gospel, and these are the first words of the Word, is, 'What are you looking for?' (1: 38). One only has to study the history of Christendom, or one's own history, to know that our replies range across the whole gamut of our own wants. What we are looking for determines what we find. And what we see, or hear, depends on what we are; as Jesus says to Pilate: 'Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice' (18: 37). He has already said elsewhere that he is himself the truth (14: 6), and there is terrible comedy when honest Pilate, thinking that it is Jesus who is on trial, responds by asking the fundamental hermeneutic question: 'What is truth?' not realising that the Truth is staring him in the face.

Secular writers naturally assume that there is a human condition, with its problems, which can then be applied to Christianity. Christian writers, sadly, often seem to make the same assumption, as if God were unaware, absent-minded, not in control. If Christianity is not adventitious, however, and that is, of course, a very large 'if', the problems of the human condition are those which the Bible has diagnosed, and questions of truth and method are already adumbrated in the biblical texts. John's gospel does not allow the reader to disengage himself, in the way that, say, Northrop Frye does at the end of *The Great Code*, by presenting the Bible as offering imaginative 'vision' (page 230) rather than demanding belief. It even defines the belief required. It is a narrative, and it forms part of a library not of philosophical works but of other narratives, and

poetry, and drama. It declares that the Son of God is the Word, not Reason, or the vague Ground of our being. It shows that the Father is not a god of propositions, of dogmas to be believed in, but of actions, and of words to be believed.

* * *

The Gospel of John begins in the beginning and ends with a reference to the end, specifically to Jesus's second coming. It opens with a quotation from the opening of the Old Testament, and closes with a wondering surmise about all the works which its subject could engender. In its relation both to reality and to writing, doesn't it present itself as, quite simply, the book?

Like Montaigne, like Eliot, the evangelist was faced, as he began to conceive his gospel, with a multiplicity of texts; but far from appalling him, they constituted 'the writings', that is to say, a body of work to which he could give his full allegiance and which was, moreover, unfinished. Along with the other writers of the New Testament, he re-writes the Old and thereby completes it, by reconstructing it in its true meaning around the focal theme of the now manifested Messiah. His gospel is unique, however, not simply in commencing with a piece of literal re-writing but in its ambition to rework and to accomplish not the core of the scriptures but their totality. His aplomb, in assuming them from the beginning, in interpreting them whole, comes from the realisation that they all lead to one book, which it is his privilege to compose, since he has been given the one subject: Jesus as the Word, which fulfils and absorbs them. His gospel is at an opposite extreme from *The Waste Land*, and yet comparable in confronting the whole of a literary past, and in being astonishingly different from any other work.

John is at the centre of the activity of re-writing, towards which all literature tends. One might even think that he gathers the other three gospels already written, though not so as to depreciate or to exhaust them: here above all 'there is no competition'. His gospel is *the* book for reasons which free it from literary arrogance. It is certainly not the supreme book as perfect artifact to be held against a world contingent and void of meaning, like that which Roquentin projects and Sartre achieves in *La Nausée*. Nor on the other hand is it the comprehensive book as model of an ordered and meaningful world itself understood as the 'Book of Nature', in the manner of

Dante's *Commedia*. It is a work of quotation which joins the beginning to the end by recounting the adventures of the Word. When Dante gazes into the light at the close of the *Paradiso*, he sees the scattered quires of the universe bound into a single volume; John binds into a single volume the hints and guesses scattered through the Hebrew scriptures.

Its nearest analogue might be Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Written in the same century as the gospel, this too is a binding of the worlds and of time, and of the works of others, into a single work. It too penetrates to origin, and concludes with a prophecy and with a reference to itself. It too is a tale of plenty. Ovid's concern, however, is to link the beginning of creation to his own life-time, through an unbroken series of stories, while the future envisaged at the close is that of his poem and of his fame. John draws everything into an extraordinarily potent and, in a way, repeatable *now*, in which the beginning and the end are both present at a moment in history, and walking in Palestine. The conclusions of the gospel concentrate on the actions of Jesus on the earth ('And many other signs truly did Jesus . . .', 'And there are also many other things which Jesus did . . .'), on the mystery of the immediate future (the destiny of John), and on the intention of the gospel, which is belief in the reader. It seeks to persuade us, but not by inviting us into a dialogue, or presenting itself for analysis: on the contrary, we are what is being analysed. It calls attention to writing but also to the need to respond. It moves without strain from what we should call literature to what we should call religion.

Notes

1. Letter to Benjamin Bailey, 22 November 1817.
2. 'Language', in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 198.
3. Quoted in the essay 'Figura' (1944), trans. Ralph Manheim, in Erich Auerbach, *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* (Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 20.
4. Letter to Benjamin Bailey, 22 November 1817. The reference is surely to the *first* dream, which ends: 'whereat I waked, and found / Before mine eyes all real', and not, as editions of the letters state, to the second.
5. Fragment 54 according to the order of the Penguin translation.
6. For another reading of the concern for beginning in Milton and Wordsworth, and for a different interest in beginning in general, see Edward W. Said, *Beginnings* (New York: Basic Books, 1975).
7. *Wordsworth's Poetry: 1787–1814* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1964), pp. 332–3.
8. 'Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931', in *The Winding Stair and Other Poems*.
9. Not, of course, that Hopkins disparages distinctiveness. For a study from a slightly different perspective, see Walter J. Ong, SJ, *Hopkins, the Self, and God* (University of Toronto Press, 1986).
10. See the Introduction to *Selected Poems: Pierre Reverdy*, a bilingual edition, translated from the French by Kenneth Rexroth (London: Jonathan Cape, 1973).
11. 'Matisse dans la lumière et le bonheur', in *Note éternelle du présent* (Paris: Flammarion, 1973), p. 161. Abbreviated as *Note*.
12. 'Essai d'esthétique littéraire', *Nord-Sud*, June–July 1917, in *Nord-Sud, Self Defence* (Paris: Flammarion, 1975), p. 45. Abbreviated as *Nord-Sud*.
13. *Le gant de crin*, new edition (Paris: Flammarion, 1968), p. 27. Abbreviated as *Gant*.
14. *Cette émotion appelée poésie* (Paris: Flammarion, 1974), pp. 14–15. Abbreviated as *Emotion*.
15. *Le livre de mon bord* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1948), p. 155. Abbreviated as *Livre*.
16. *Versant de l'âge* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1958), p. 19.
17. Quoted from *Pierre Emmanuel*, ed. Alain Bosquet (Paris: Seghers, 1959), pp. 205–6.
18. *Car enfin je vous aime*, enlarged edition (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1983), p. 169.
19. Author's introduction to *Pierre Emmanuel*, ed. Bosquet, pp. 17–18.
20. 'Distance, aspect, origine', in *Tel Quel: Théorie d'ensemble* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1968), p. 24.
21. 'On Narcissism: An Introduction', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey, vol. 14 (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), p. 94.

22. 'The Contingency of Selfhood', *London Review of Books*, vol. 8, no. 8, 8 May 1986, p. 14.
23. 'The Subject and Power', in Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Brighton: Harvester, 1982), p. 212.
24. Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (London: Jonathan Cape, 1975), p. 10.
25. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), p. 125.
26. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. 93.
27. 'Die Zeit des Weltbildes' (1938), quoted in Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, ed. Don Ihde (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1974), pp. 227–8.
28. *The Rise of the Novel* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), pp. 77, 183.
29. *The World and the Book* (London: Macmillan, 1971), p. 144.
30. *The Conflict of Interpretations*, p. 242.
31. *Reflections on the Psalms* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1958), p. 64.
32. *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), p. 361.
33. *Epoch and Artist* (London: Faber & Faber, 1959), pp. 199–200.
34. John Morris, *The Age of Arthur* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1973).
35. *In Parenthesis* (London: Faber & Faber, 1937), p. xi.
36. David Jones, *Epoch and Artist*, p. 196.
37. See Paul Ricoeur, *History and Truth*, trans. Charles A. Kelbley (Evanston Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1965), p. 194.
38. I am quoting the essay, translated as 'The Use and Abuse of History', in *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. Oscar Levy, vol 2, trans. Adrian Collins (Yeovil: Foulis, 1909).
39. 'Literary History and Literary Modernity', in *Blindness and Insight* (London: Methuen, 1983), p. 152.
40. Erich Auerbach, 'Figura', in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature*, p. 58.
41. *The Order of Things*, a translation of *Les Mots et les choses* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), pp. 372–3, 371.
42. Respectively, *Epoch and Artist*, p. 231, and *The Sleeping Lord and other fragments* (London: Faber & Faber, 1974), p. 86.
43. David Jones, *Epoch and Artist*, p. 199.
44. *Arthurian Torso*, containing the posthumous fragment of *The Figure of Arthur* by Charles Williams and a commentary on the Arthurian poems of Charles Williams by C. S. Lewis (Oxford University Press, 1948), p. 53.
45. *Arthurian Torso*, pp. 11–12.
46. Rimbaud, *Une Saison en enfer*, 'Délires I'.
47. For the drafts see Helen Gardner, *The Composition of 'Four Quartets'* (London: Faber and Faber, 1978), pp. 157–8.
48. 'Pound and Eliot: a distinction', in Graham Martin, ed., *Eliot in Perspective* (London: Macmillan, 1970), pp. 65–6.
49. 'T. S. Eliot's *Quartets*: a new reading', *Studies*, 1965, p. 62.
50. *'Four Quartets' Rehearsed* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1946), p. 9.

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